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STUDIES IN
THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

THE EPISTLE OF CONSOLATIONS: STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

BY THE

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ἀνέχεσθε τοῦ λογοῦ τῆς παρακλήσεως

LONDON

G. J. PALMER & SONS

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PREFACE

THE following studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews appeared originally as articles in *The Treasury*. They aim at presenting in a popular and readable, though, at the same time, it is trusted, an accurate form, the general lines of the apostolic teaching as it appears in this great Epistle. For the English reader the continuous explanation of a passage of Holy Scripture is probably more attractive than a detailed commentary, and with the assistance of the Index, a clue to many of the difficult texts and passages may be quite as easily found. For those who wish to go deeper, and have some acquaintance with Greek, no commentary can be compared with the great work of the late Bishop Westcott. The present writer owes very much to it; indeed, it is scarcely possible to over-estimate the value of its careful scholarship, and its fresh and suggestive interpretations.

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As the title of this volume implies, its purpose is not merely exegetical. The writer has attempted, however slightly and imperfectly, to follow out the line suggested by the opening words of Westcott's remarkable Preface: 'Every student of the Epistle to the Hebrews must feel that it deals in a peculiar degree with the thoughts and trials of our own time.' He has ventured to suggest, in a time of much genuine uncertainty and searching of hearts, some of the present 'consolations' which this Epistle abundantly contains, in the firm conviction that Holy Scripture is its own best apologist, and that in a devout and conscientious study of it will be found the key to many of our present religious difficulties. Perhaps this little volume may supply some readers with materials for meditation and devotional study, especially in such seasons as Advent and Passiontide.

The Chart was designed, some years ago, to illustrate a course of lectures on the Epistle, delivered to the students of a theological college; and Bishop Westcott wrote of it at the time: 'It will help many, I hope, to give distinctness to some of the wonderful correspondences which exist between the different orders through which God is pleased to reveal Himself to us.'

In conclusion, it should be said that if, in places, the writer has felt it necessary to touch upon controversial subjects, it has been with the intention, not of laying down any private or party opinion, but of stimulating the reader to independent thought. In a time like our own, pre-eminently, men need to empty their minds of inherited prejudice, and to study for themselves the 'living oracles,' looking for help to the Eternal Spirit Who still speaks in them; and being willing to be guided by no narrower tradition than that of the whole Catholic Church, 'the pillar and ground of the truth.'

A. R. W.

CULHAM: *September* 1904.

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THE EPISTLE OF CONSOLATIONS

I

THE FAINTING CHURCH

WHO wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews is one of those questions which do not lose their fascination because it is impossible to answer them. The traditional ascription of it to St. Paul by the Church at large does not date earlier than the middle of the fourth century. Even then it was assigned to him, not so much for any critical reason as because it was supposed necessary to an epistle being counted canonical that it should be the work of some known apostle. There is doubtless something attractive in the thought that the great apostle of the Gentiles should for once have addressed those of his own nation who had turned to the Lord. And there is much in the Epistle which on the face of it seems to suggest St. Paul—the prominence of 'faith'; the grasp of the relationship of the Law to the Gospel; the similarities of style, especially in the last chapter; the allusion to Timothy (xiii. 23); the Pauline blessing: 'Grace be with you all' (xiii. 25, *cf.* 2 Thess.

iii. 17, 18). And yet that St. Paul was not the author of the Epistle in its present shape has been constantly asserted in all periods of criticism, and is now regarded by most scholars as a practical certainty. However, a still greater certainty is that the Epistle sprang from the immediate circle of St. Paul, from one of his disciples and fellow labourers. His influence is unmistakably seen in it. The actual writer, one in whom the inspiring breath of the Holy Ghost met with an intellect of high order, and a surpassing literary skill, had felt the power of St. Paul's magnificent idealism; he had drunk in St. Paul's imperial and Catholic presentation of the Gospel; he had learned with him, and probably from him, that all things are gathered together in Christ, that the preaching of Him is the one final answer to the mysteries of the world and of man.

It may have been St. Luke, as the earliest tradition derived from the School of Alexandria stated, and as the similarity of the style (the most finished and artistic in the New Testament) seems to suggest. But St. Luke was a Gentile, and who but a Jew could have written with such a depth of Jewish feeling, with such sympathy for the past history and institutions of the holy nation?

It may possibly have been St. Clement of Rome, whose Epistle is largely coloured by it, though he never expressly quotes from it.

More likely perhaps than either of these early suggestions is the definite statement of Tertullian that the Epistle was written by St. Barnabas. There are some remarkable arguments that may be adduced

in favour of this ;[1] and to some there may seem an inherent probability that a Levite was the author of these delicate and suggestive appreciations of the Tabernacle and its worship, and of the conception, almost peculiar to this Epistle, of the High-priesthood of Christ. The stateliness and reserve of the Epistle are what we might expect from him whose silent and awe-inspiring figure the heathen of Lystra took for Olympian Zeus himself (Acts xiv. 12). The concluding appeal to 'bear with the word of exhortation' might seem intended to suggest the title which the Church's love had given to her earliest convert mentioned by name in the Acts (iv. 36), 'the son of consolation'; the words 'consolation' and 'exhortation' being the same in the original.[2]

But further than these possibilities we cannot go. The author has hidden himself well, though it is evident that the original readers are assumed to know who he is, for he bids them pray that he 'may be restored the sooner' to them (xiii. 18, 19). But we in this later day must be content to say of the Epistle what St. Francis of Sales said of the 'Imitation,' 'the Holy Ghost is the author'; and to remember what the 'Imitation' itself says of Holy Scripture (advice very necessary in our own time): 'Ask not who wrote this or that, but mark what is written.'[3]

But though the writer's name and personality are hidden, the characteristics of those to whom he wrote are clear enough. Incidental allusions scattered about the Epistle enable us to reconstruct with a

[1] See Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Introduction, xxviii., xxix.)
[2] παράκλησις, derived from the same verb as 'Paraclete.' [3] I.v.

certain vividness the condition of the Church of 'the Hebrews,' even though its local habitation is a matter of controversy. It is generally assumed to have been the Church of Jerusalem, which during the first century was composed entirely, as no other Church could have been, of converts from Judaism. But, be that as it may, the Christians addressed in the Epistle are in peculiar need of the word of exhortation and consolation. They have evidently passed out of the first period of their conversion; they are going through a time of change, of heart-searchings, of spiritual stress and peril. The writer can look back with gratitude upon their earlier days, the spring-time of their faith, when they had first received the illuminating grace of Baptism (x. 32). At that time it had been their privilege to *suffer*, to endure derision and persecution for Christ's sake; though they had not actually 'resisted unto blood' (xii. 4), they had gladly ranged themselves on the side of the martyrs and confessors (x. 33, 34).[1] This world had seemed to them well lost in comparison with what they had gained, not merely a future heaven, but the 'hundred-fold in this present world.' They had lost themselves to gain themselves—'knowing that ye have your own selves for a better possession and an abiding one' (x. 34, R.V. margin). 'The powers of the world to come' had been very near to them, for those from whom they had received the Gospel had heard it from the Lord Himself, and God had borne witness to their message 'by signs and wonders, and by

[1] See the correction made by R.V. The allusion is not to the writer himself, but to the prisoners of Christ in general.

manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Ghost' (ii. 3, 4). They had enjoyed the blessing of faithful pastors, whose deaths as well as their lives were inspirations. 'Remember them that had the rule over you, which spake unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their lives, imitate their faith' (xiii. 7). Moreover, the Hebrews themselves had shown forth, and were still showing, the truest and most permanent miracle of the Gospel, 'charity'—'your work and labour of love which ye showed toward His name, in that ye ministered unto the saints and still do minister' (vi. 10).

But mingling with these words of praise and thankfulness, and thrown into strong relief by them, come apostolic warnings, hinted at with graceful tact, dropped, as it were, sometimes almost by accident, but quite unmistakable. The Hebrews are in danger of making 'the great refusal,' of losing the great reward. The first of these warnings comes in ii. 1. 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them.' 'Drift away'—it is a significant metaphor. The ship, thought to be securely fastened to the shore, gradually by the movement of the water becomes unloosed; slowly, at first imperceptibly, she leaves the shore, and drifts out helplessly to sea, the prey of wind and current. A more definite warning is sounded in chapters iii. and iv., where the quotation from Psalm xcv. suggests that old temptations and perils are always liable to return; that human nature is still the same as it was in the days of the Exodus; that unbelief, disobedience,

impatience will always make high privileges and callings of no avail; that there is still a wilderness to fall in, and a Sabbath-rest of Canaan that may be easily lost. 'Let us fear, therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it' (iv. 1).

These delicate reproofs, in which the writer endeavours to place himself by the side of those to whom he writes, speaking often of 'we' rather than 'you,' lead on to the sterner words of chapters v. and vi. The Hebrews are plainly told that they have not made the progress in spiritual knowledge—that is, in the interpretation of God's will as revealed in the circumstances of life—which might reasonably have been expected. They are 'dull of hearing'; they are still babes, still among the rudiments, still requiring to learn the very foundation truths (v. 11–14). And then follows one of the most terrible passages of the New Testament. 'For, as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance' (vi. 4–6). This passage, if it stood by itself, and were interpreted without reference to the rest of Scripture and the teaching of the Church, might seem to deny the possibility of repentance to the wilful apostate. It certainly does not intend to do that, for the reference in the word 'renew again' is primarily to Holy Baptism, the sacrament of regeneration, which can

never be repeated. The Christian, having once received the fulness of the gift of Christ, can never again be as the heathen. Nor can he, if he fall away, ever again know the full blessedness of the change from the old life to the new. But, besides this, the passage seems to suggest that there is an awful likelihood that one who has once known the truth, and deliberately turned away from it, will never repent, and so can never be forgiven. This teaching, so like that of Christ Himself when He spoke of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost and the 'eternal sin,'[1] so unlike the frivolousness of our own time, which thinks of sin as a mere hereditary drawback, and denial of the Faith as an allowable change of opinion, is followed up by a still clearer statement in chapter x. Even the one perfect sacrifice of Christ Himself is there shown to be unavailing for those who sin against conscience; 'there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries' (x. 26, 27).

The question inevitably arises—what is this grave declension in the Church of the Hebrews that calls for such dread threatenings?—for dreadful they are, although softened by love, and by the evident fear of discouraging. What are the sins which can even suggest such words as these of 'crucifying the Son of God afresh,' of 'treading under foot the Son of God'? There is no accusation made against the Hebrews of grave moral offences such as called for St. Paul's rebukes upon the Corinthians; to those sins there is

[1] See the remarkable correction by R.V. of St. Mark iii. 29.

only a passing allusion in two verses (xii. 16; xiii. 4). There are no such catalogues of 'the works of the flesh' as find place in the Epistles to the Romans, the Ephesians, the Galatians. There is no idolatry, and no conscious hypocrisy; the Hebrews have not been ensnared by false teachers, nor wandered into heresies. What, then, is it? 'Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God' (iii. 12). The Hebrews are failing in *faith*, in the courage of faith, the patience of faith. One evident cause of this is that they are yielding to the pressure of the society around them. 'The reproach of Christ' (xi. 26; xiii. 13), the separation which His name involves, are becoming too hard for them; like Him they are a mark for the 'gainsaying of sinners' (xii. 3), and they are fainting before it. The steadfastness of faith which had characterised their earlier years is giving way to indifference. There is a drawing back (x. 39), a drifting away, a shrinking from the Cross. Other results are following; they are losing their hold of the anchor of hope (vi. 19); they are losing the cheerfulness, the joy of the Christian life; their energy is failing, their hands are hanging down, their knees are palsied (xii. 12); common feeling, sympathy with each other, too, are being lost; they are shrinking from common worship, and mutual encouragement (x. 24, 25). And yet to those whose ears are not dulled the time is calling for the very opposite of all that. There are ominous signs of some greater trial near at hand than any they have yet endured; 'the day' is drawing near

(x. 25), the shaking of earth and heaven is at hand (xii. 26, 27).

It is easy to see how this picture harmonises with what may well have been the condition of the Church of Jerusalem some thirty years after its foundation. There must have been the inevitable cooling of the first human enthusiasm. The primal burst of miraculous gifts was over, the Apostles were scattered, some of them were dead. Something of 'the light of common day' had taken the place of that first rapturous vision of the conquering Christ. The community of goods had resulted in general poverty and dependence upon the alms of the Gentile Churches. A new generation was springing up who had not known the Day of Pentecost. And all the while the hatred and opposition of the unconverted Jews around them were increasing. The early awe and even favour with which they had regarded the Christian Church had long passed away (see Acts ii. 47; v. 13; xxviii. 22). At first the Christians of Jerusalem had worshipped in the Temple (Acts iii. 1; xxi. 26), but now they were, in all probability, cut off from it, excommunicate, ostracised. Bound still to their neighbours by so many ties—nationality, kinsmanship, common memories—they were treated as aliens. They would seem to have lost much and gained little. We can well imagine the daily stress of such inward temptations as these. Was Christ indeed what we thought Him to be? Is the hope of His appearing which we looked for as so soon to happen really a vain hope? Have we cut ourselves off from Israel for what was after

all a phantom? Most puzzling of all—the Temple, with its ordered, age-long worship, is still standing; the priests after the order of Aaron fulfil their ministry. The solemn feasts run in their annual course. We have no share in these things, and the new age, 'the world to come,' which seemed to be opening upon us, has after all made no difference. The old still remains, with all its solemn sanctions, its persuasive appeal.

A few more years indeed, and the hand of God was visibly to be interposed. The year 70 A.D. would see the most significant event in Christian history, the passing away before men's very eyes of the old order, the literal fulfilment of the Lord's predictions. 'Not one stone upon another' would be left of the Temple, and the holy people would be 'led captive into all the nations.' Already the mutterings of the distant storm might be heard, but as yet it had not broken. The Christians of Jerusalem, we know, passed unscathed through that agony of fire and blood. Looking back from their retreat at Pella, they must have felt that they had indeed received 'a kingdom that cannot be shaken' (xii. 28). But these things had not come to pass when the Apostolic writer addressed his Epistle to them. They were weary of doubt and uncertainty and contradiction; they were ready to 'faint in their minds.'

But the Epistle to the Hebrews has other and deeper interests for us than those of historical speculation. Each reader indeed may find his own peculiar warning and consolation in it. To most

of us it will harmonise with our inward spiritual experience. It will help us in the face of that constant problem of the Christian life, how to maintain 'patience,' how to keep quick and fresh and living our Christian faith and hope, when the enthusiasms of youth are fading and the first vividness of our conversion is past. To some again it may suggest consolations in view of the separations of Christendom. We of the Church of England must for Christ's sake be content for the present to stand, as it were, 'without the camp,' to be estranged from that great and august communion which outwardly at least seems so changeless, so certain of herself. But it is better for us to bear 'the reproach of Christ' than to surrender against our consciences any truth which we know; just as it is certainly better for us to feel some sadness at our isolation, than to repose in the self-complacency of an 'Establishment' or the self-righteousness of Protestantism.

But there are broader aspects than these in which the Epistle to the Hebrews seems almost specially addressed to our own times, and speaks with a startling 'modernness.' The Epistle is written, as we have seen, for those who were feeling the burden of separation from the common life and nterests around them, the weariness of the contrast between bright anticipations and a dull reality. And their temptation was to lose 'patience,' to lose the certainties of faith which alone could help them to maintain this separation from the world, and to carry on their high conflict with cheerfulness and hope. And is not this a picture of the Church of to-day?

We cannot with any real justice say that we are living in an age of unusual moral corruption, but we are certainly living in a time when faith grows weary, when the heavenly vision is blurred and darkened. The world still pursues its course side by side with the Church of God, so near, though its spirit is so alien; its subtle, impalpable pressure is ever striving to break down the barrier which God has placed. And just in proportion as the world is yielded to, the Church will be wanting in energy, in joy, in hope: her own mission will fail to kindle enthusiasm, her warfare will seem first to be unnecessary and then unmeaning.

But nowhere perhaps are the encroachments of the world upon the Church so much to be dreaded as in that to which the Apostolic writer specially directs the mind of the Hebrews, the fundamental principles of the Catholic faith. It is a commonplace to say that ours is an age of change and progress and uncertainty. More difficult to realise is the wide and penetrating power of that modern spirit which endeavours to exclude what for want of a better word must be called 'the supernatural' in religion. Unrivalled industry, steadily working with every weapon that can be pressed into service from history, comparative religion, science, archæology, is striving to persuade men that there is no difference in origin, and therefore in authority, between the Bible and any other literature; that the facts of the Creed must be viewed, criticised, revised as an historical development; that the Church herself can claim to be no more than a human institution; nay, that there is

neither room nor necessity for a Divine purpose in the world (the most fundamental postulate of religion); that sin, responsibility to God, a judgment, a life to come, are ideas that have done their work and must disappear. So modern thought and modern life run their course with such ease, such apparent certainty. They make their appeal, half contemptuous, half benevolent, to the Church to surrender an untenable position; they tell her that she may still have the fruits of Christianity without the dogmas that alienate modern thought and even practical common-sense. They bid her, like Rab-shakeh of old, to come to terms and be taken away 'to a land like your own land' (2 Kings xviii. 31, 32).

What wonder if many Christians are hesitating, losing patience, wandering deviously with palsied knees and fainting hearts, asking themselves, Is it worth while running counter to the whole spirit of the world? Need we maintain our old belief in the Bible and the Sacraments, in this or that difficult article of the Catholic faith—the Virgin-birth of the Lord, the Resurrection? Need we, dare we, any longer repeat the Athanasian Creed?

And yet who knows whether the hidden issues of our present conflict are not far more awful than they seem, the end much nearer, whether that which seems the knell of the ancient faith is not really the trumpet of the Lord's appearing—whether it is not 'a very little while, and He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry'?

And thus we need, all of us, more than we think, the warnings of the Epistle that a wilful surrender of

the Faith is a crucifying of Christ afresh. And we need, too, the manifold consolations which the holy writer sets forth so tenderly, so vividly—most of all, we need that which is his central teaching, to fix our eyes upon the figure of the living Christ. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the gaze so steadily directed upon the personal mediator, 'the strong Son of God,' Who is the fulfiller of all human experience, the answer to every human need. With Him the writer begins, 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus' (iii. 1); with Him he ends, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever. Be not carried away by divers and strange teachings' (xiii. 8, 9).

II

DIVINE PURPOSE

'GOD, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds' (Hebrews i. 1, 2). Nowhere perhaps in the whole Bible are so many profound truths expressed so briefly and concisely as in this sentence, the majestic prelude of the Epistle—an opening which has been well compared to the appearance of the great Melchizedek himself, sudden, unheralded, 'without father, without mother, without genealogy.' Its clear and balanced antitheses set the main thought of the Epistle at once before the reader. The whole world, the whole progress of time, with all that puzzles, pains, provokes in man's long history, is instinct with one Divine purpose. And this purpose has been gradually revealed to man by its Author, revealed in a way different in kind from all the ordinary channels of human knowledge. Over and above all the knowledge which man has won or tried to win by his questioning of Nature, by the study of his own heart, or from the slowly hoarded wisdom of the past, God has Himself been speaking

to man. He has spoken 'in the prophets.' There has been a succession of chosen souls who were empowered to grasp in some degree, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, the working of God's own mind, and were authorised to declare this mind to their fellow-men.

The primary and chief reference is to the prophets and inspired teachers and writers of the Old Testament. It is not necessarily confined to these. The Old Testament itself had witnessed to the existence of true prophets of God (such as Balaam), whatever use they may have made of their gifts, among nations other than Israel. In speaking of prophecy, of that succession of holy prophets 'which have been since the world began,' there is room for that magnificent conception which Michael Angelo has deathlessly set forth in the Sistine Chapel, where the prophets of Israel alternate with the Sibyls, the prophetesses of the heathen. God did not leave Himself without witness in any nation: yet the utterances of pagan oracles and Sibyls, like the inarticulate testimonies of Nature, would have remained dark and fragmentary without the authoritative clue possessed by the chosen nation of Israel.

God has spoken in these prophets, 'by divers portions and in divers manners'—a remarkable and unique phrase, which well repays our study. 'By divers portions'—no one of the old interpreters of God to man was in possession of the whole of the truth. He had only such portion or aspect of it as was in harmony with the needs of his time, his own character, his relation to his fellows. Nor did the portion of Divine truth which it was given to any

one generation or epoch to learn or to reject exhaust the possibilities of revelation. Each era added its contribution to the Divine education of the world: patriarchs like Abraham saw and rejoiced in some aspect or foreshadowing of God's purposes; legislators like Moses had their special work; the priests and prophets and wise men of Israel, kings like Hezekiah, and statesmen like Nehemiah, each had their place and function as parts of a whole. 'The separate acts of the great drama of Israel's discipline,' to use the fine expression of Bishop Westcott, each brought home sooner or later to human conscience some portion of the Divine message.

'In divers manners'—national judgments and national deliverances, the solemn ritual of sacrifice, the ordered discipline of social life, the rapture of song, the idealism of prophecy, the daring questionings, even the scepticism which did not shrink from looking at the facts of life in their darkest and most hopeless aspects, Job as well as Isaiah, the Song of Songs as well as the Psalter, all in their own manner helped to the unfolding of Divine purpose.

The appearance on earth of Jesus Christ, though strictly in line and harmony with all that had gone before and all that was to follow, yet differed in kind from all other revelation. It was the complete, final, and perfect speaking of God to men. He was no prophet, but 'a Son'; not a mere man commissioned to speak Divine truth, as he was able to grasp it, to his fellow, but the One Who stood in a unique relationship to God, of equality and oneness of nature; not merely one whose utterances were conditioned by

birth, education, intellect, circumstance, but 'the Heir of all things'; not one unit in the succession of created beings, but He Who while in the world was yet its Master and its Author, 'through whom also He made the worlds.'

Hence the revelation of Jesus Christ is the turning-point in man's history. He closes an epoch, the preparatory period or sum of periods which the writer to the Hebrews calls 'these days' or 'this present time' (i. 2; ix. 9). With Christ's Ascension is inaugurated a new age—'the world to come' (ii. 5); an age not of shadows, types, fragmentary truths, but of powers and realities (vi. 5); an age in which death has no true place (ii. 15); an age which stretches forth without a break from the world as we think we know it into the boundless spaces of eternity. Into this world Christians have already entered. This is one of the fundamental teachings of the Epistle. The unbeliever, the heathen, is still in the old world of imperfections and shadows and death; he has not got the key to the true meaning of the universe or his own life; in the words of St. Paul he is still 'subject to vanity' (Rom. viii. 20). The Christian, whatever his position, shares in the universal heritage of Christ; he has passed through death in his baptism; like the true philosopher of Plato, he is the 'spectator of all time and all existence'; his is the vision of the Christian poet[1]:—

> I saw Eternity the other night
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
> All calm as it was bright;

[1] Henry Vaughan.

> And round beneath it Time, in hours, days, years,
> Driven by the spheres,
> Like a vast shadow moved: in which the world
> And all her train were hurl'd.

But the older revelation is not over and done with because Christ has come. Nor is its value to the Christian evidential only. Indeed, the use made of the Old Testament in this Epistle is one of its most interesting features. The Old Testament is quoted absolutely as the word of the Holy Ghost (iii. 7); not as having merely its value as a preparation for Christ, but as possessing a permanent and expanding meaning for Christian times. Such is, indeed, exactly the teaching of Christ Himself concerning 'the Law and the Prophets.' No part of the older revelation is to pass away until 'fulfilled,' *i.e.* 'filled full' of meaning; and this can hardly be, so long as human progress lasts.

To understand this we need to grasp the true nature of 'prophecy.' Prophecy is not merely or chiefly the foretelling of future events. To speak of prophecy as 'inverted history' is a very meagre and mechanical conception, and one which may easily degenerate into something not far removed from 'fortune-telling.' The 'prophet,' using the word in its widest sense, is the 'seer' in Divine things who, like the seers of the kingdom of Nature, grasps not merely isolated facts, but the *law* which unifies the facts and gives meaning to them. The inspired prophets of the Old Testament were privileged to grasp the laws or principles of the Divine operations, and so to interpret alike either the past, the present, or the future. Hence their words have a permanent

and growing significance for each generation that has ears to hear. Though their utterances are in themselves partial and limited—'by divers portions and in divers manners'—yet when brought into union with Him Who is the key to them they are seen as 'living oracles.'

An illustration is to be seen in the remarkable and at first sight difficult exposition of Ps. xcv. in chapter iv. The Authorised Version has obscured the meaning by an over-literal translation. 'If they shall enter into My rest' simply means 'They shall not enter into My rest' (R.V.). With this correction the argument of the passage will be seen to be as follows: The warnings and promises of God to the Israelites in their progress from Egypt to Canaan were not exhausted by the entrance into 'the land of promise.' They have a far-reaching and ever-widening significance, which is only seen aright when brought into connection with the rest of Scripture and the work of Jesus Christ, the antitype of Joshua. For the Psalmist centuries afterwards repeats both the warning and the promise, and it is still with him 'to-day' (iv. 7). And the 'rest' spoken of is more than Canaan; the very phrase implies more: 'They shall not enter into *My* rest'; this is the eternal rest of God Himself—the true Sabbath of which the seventh day is a type (*ib.* 3). 'There remaineth therefore'—*i.e.* in reserve, still unattained—'a Sabbath rest for the people of God,' and for this each successive Christian 'to-day' is a probation (*ib.* 9). So, again, in a later chapter (xi.) the promises and hopes of the patriarchs are interpreted in the same spirit, as being

neither temporal nor transitory. They are promises and hopes for us Christians, who are privileged to see them in grander and vaster meanings. Abraham 'looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' He and his descendants 'desire' (mark the present tense) 'a better country; that is, an heavenly.' Moses bore 'the reproach of Christ.' The martyrs of the old covenant received not the promise, 'God having provided some better thing concerning us.'

This interpretation of the Old Testament carries us a stage further in the understanding of the Divine purpose in history. Christians have indeed entered with Christ upon a new age, a world of perfection, foretold in Ps. viii. as the ideal destiny of man (ii. 5–7). But whence comes the strange variance between this truth and the patent facts of life? It was here that the Hebrews, and not they only, needed 'consolation.' 'We see not yet all things put under him' (ii. 8). The fact is admitted, the world is not yet subject to man redeemed in Christ; the very reverse seems nearer the truth. Why are we outcasts and persecuted? Why is the dead age still apparently in undisturbed possession? The answer is this: The 'world to come'—*i.e.* the Christian age now established—is still, as far as this earth is concerned, an age of progress, of gradual fulfilment, of gradual realisation of all that God has spoken to us in His Son. In the fundamental truths of the Faith there can be no change. Jesus Christ is the final and a perfect revelation of the Father. Change in what is perfect is unthinkable. Christ has indeed come,

and He is already 'crowned with glory and honour' (ii. 9); but His exaltation has still to be completed by the exaltation of humanity, the bringing of 'many sons to glory' (ii. 10). Christ is already known and loved and worshipped by His Church, but the Holy Ghost has yet 'many things to say' of Him (v. 11). New and fuller meanings will be found in the old promises; new aspects of Christ's work and office will have to be learned to suit the changing circumstances of the world. One remarkable example of this is provided by the Epistle itself. Christ is shown to be 'a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.'

But it must be ever remembered that in this Christian progress and education we are in an absolutely different position from those who are not Christians. Even the prophets of Israel had to search 'what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify' (1 Peter i. 10, 11). We take our stand on the certainties of faith. 'Jesus Christ'—by whatever agonies His kingdom may progress to its triumph, whatever His people may still have to learn concerning Him—'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever.' 'We see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus.' This sublime antithesis contains in itself the answer to every Christian difficulty. In Christ as the Church knows and believes Him is contained implicitly the full accomplishment of the Divine purpose.

By a different path in chapter vi. the reader is led to the same conclusion. The great promise to Abraham, solemnly renewed from heaven after the

had undergone the supreme test of faith in the offering of Isaac (Gen. xxii. 15–18), is a promise which the Church still inherits, of blessing and enlargement. And this promise has been confirmed by the most unique sanction, the oath of God. God promised; and, as if that were not enough, He 'interposed with an oath.' He came in, as it were, in mediation between man and Himself[1] (the Incarnation is implied in the phrase), in confirmation of His word. He appealed to the highest conceivable—to His own eternal nature and Godhead. 'Since He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself.' So 'by two immutable things' (God's word and God's oath) 'we may have a strong encouragement ['consolation'] who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul' (vi. 18, 19). 'Hope is one of the characteristic words of the Epistle; and the representation of hope as an anchor has laid deeply hold of Christian thought. One of the earliest of all Christian symbols, to be seen on the walls of the catacombs, is the anchor. Just as 'drifting' had been spoken of (ii. 1) as a peril, so hope is the anchor which binds fast. And by hope the writer means the laying hold of unseen *certainties* to come. Our hope is anchored behind this veil of material things, as our earthly vision sees them; it is fixed where Jesus Himself is, the Forerunner, the Possessor already of man's heritage, the effectual Mediator for man, the eternal High Priest.

Such, then, are the first consolations which the writer sets before the fainting Hebrew Church, the certainty of the Divine purpose, gradually prepared

[1] ἐμεσίτευσεν.

for in the prophets, fully revealed in Christ, now being fulfilled and realised in the Church. Hope bridges over the gulf between the contradictions, the uncertainties, the sufferings of this world and the eternally perfect state which lies beyond the veil. Christ is 'made perfect,' and in Him, of whom we are partakers, 'all things are returning,' as the ancient collect has it, 'to their first perfection, through Him from whom they took their origin.'

There is no 'consolation' more abundantly needed by many hesitating Christians than this reassurance of Divine purpose. That the world and human life are an unending, purposeless movement; that behind the visible scenery of Nature there is neither will, nor wisdom, nor love—these nightmares are crushing to man's hope and endeavour. The doctrine of evolution—which, rightly understood, should help to a higher view of the 'manifold wisdom of God'—has been largely interpreted so as to exclude God altogether. The reign of law in Nature (which is strictly in accordance with the teaching of Scripture) has been strained so as to render even human free-will a delusion. Common-sense—the homely, cheerful wisdom of man's own experience of himself and of life—is indeed now revolting against such dreary and mechanical negations; and other branches of study, history and comparative religion, are witnessing to the great truth with which the Epistle opens, that the whole course of the world tends towards Christ. The more deeply we realise what is meant by the continued existence, the exaltation of Christ, the more we shall be convinced of the harmony, the

unity, the certainty of God's working—that 'it became Him, for Whom are all things, and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings' (ii. 10).

Again, the Epistle suggests a much-needed consolation in regard to the use of Holy Scripture. The Puritanical view of the Bible is passing away. It was never the view of the Catholic Church. We can no longer wither an opponent with a text, or cite an isolated passage as conclusive or binding on the conscience, without considering its wider relations as well as the Church's interpretation. On the other hand, it is a mere counsel of despair to try to ignore Holy Scripture, to imagine that its meaning is outworn, or that only the expert in archæology and ancient languages has any concern with it. Holy Scripture is still and must ever be the word of the living God and of living importance to all the children of God. Whatever may have been the processes which brought it into its present form, whatever colouring it may have received from the character or circumstances of its writers, whatever part allegory or poetry may play in it, the Holy Ghost is the author of it all. So far from Scripture becoming out of date, its meaning becomes fuller as the world draws to an end. Its teaching concerning God and man and the relations between them is immutable. It is for each age and each individual to interpret this teaching more fully and more inwardly. Even those parts of Scripture which at first sight seem to belong to a past, or to a way of looking

at things which is absolutely gone, yield to prayer and study a meaning and a power which are always new. In the words of St. Jerome, 'each individual sacrifice, the garments of Aaron, the whole Levitical order, breathe forth heavenly mysteries. . . . David sounds forth Christ on his harp and psaltery of ten strings, and brings Him up alive from the dead.' [1]

> The word unto the prophet spoken
> Was writ on tables yet unbroken:
> The word by seers or sibyls told
> In groves of oak or fanes of gold
> Still floats upon the morning wind,
> Still whispers to the willing mind.
> One accent of the Holy Ghost
> The heedless world hath never lost.[2]

One other 'consolation' has been suggested by these opening words of the Epistle. In the person of Jesus Christ we have the key not only to the past, but to the future. If in Him we see the figure, to use the beautiful words of Walter Pater, 'which seems to have absorbed, like a tincture of deep dyes into His vesture, all that was most deep-felt and impassioned in the experiences of the past,' [3] we see also One upon whose head are 'many crowns,' the emblems of lordship over every department of man's life. We may with confidence look to Him for the resolution in its time of every problem—for the due ordering of social and national life, for the union of warring sects and schools, for the harmonising of apparently irreducible contradictions, for the explaining even of the final mysteries of pain and evil

[1] Preface to the *Vulgate*. [2] Emerson, *The Problem*.
[3] *Marius the Epicurean*, c. xxiii.

and unbelief, for the gathering together of all things ('the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth') in Him Who 'sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet' (x. 13).

The teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews on this subject, the highest and worthiest surely that can call out the hopes and the enthusiasm of man, would seem to be fittingly expressed in those great pictures so dear to the early centuries of the Church, the colossal 'Majesties,' which, in painting or mosaic, tower above the worshippers in the old basilicas,[1] catching the eye and dominating the thought, the pictures of Christ vested in His three-fold office, crowned and throned as universal King, bearing the Book which He alone can unseal as universal Teacher and Prophet, lifting His hand in intercession and blessing as the universal Priest. Those who have such a conception of their Saviour as this in their hearts have indeed a 'strong consolation'; they are in touch with the innermost secret of things. In the sorrows of the Church, more inward, perhaps even more agonising, to-day than the sufferings of the first centuries, they can make their own such words as those which one of the ancient martyrs,[2] 'spreading out his hands to the sun-rising,' uttered at the place of his death: 'Let us call upon the Spotless, the Infinite One, Who sitteth upon the Cherubim, the Maker of all things, the First and the Last, to Whom be glory for ever.'

[1] As *e.g.* in the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian at Rome.

[2] Phileas, Bishop of Thmuis, who suffered under Diocletian.

III

THE SON OF GOD

WHO, then, is this 'Son,' in whom God has spoken finally to men; through whom the worlds took their beginning; to whom all things belong by the dateless appointment of the Father? This question is obviously a fundamental one. As we have already seen, it is the Son of God Who is the central subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is to Him that the reader's eye and heart are continually directed. No 'consolation' addressed to men who are fainting under the burden of the world, who are tempted to waver in their glad allegiance to Christ, could be more than a sentiment—nay, little better than an impertinence—unless the question were clearly answered at the very outset, 'Who is He?'

'Who being the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high' (i. 3). The two opening phrases of this magnificent verse set before us in two aspects the essential nature of the Son of God. 'The effulgence of His glory'—What is meant by the familiar but seldom defined expression 'the glory of God'? It has

been explained as 'the full manifestation of God's attributes, according to man's power of apprehending them' (Westcott). In using such a definition, however, we need to distinguish between 'the glory of God' and another conception very frequently found in the Bible, that of 'the Name of God.' The latter includes certainly all the characteristic attributes of God as He has made them known to man—His eternity, power, wisdom, love. But 'the glory of God' is something more than the Name, more than the communication of these things to the intellect or heart of man. It is better described under such figures as those of 'light' or 'splendour.' God's 'glory' is His infinite worthiness as it bursts in upon the soul of man and floods his innermost being with the sense of its *beauty*. It is something 'seen' rather than merely 'known.' So in the Scriptures man is spoken of as knowing, fearing, believing in, or loving the Name of God; but God's 'glory' is what he *hopes* for, what according to his measure he may *see*. The 'Name of God' was revealed to Moses on the mount, when the Lord passed by and proclaimed 'the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth' (Exod. xxxiv. 6); but the 'glory' was shown to him only as it was passing away, while he was hid in the cleft of the rock: its full blaze he could not have endured, and lived. So the glory of the Lord appeared as 'devouring fire' to Israel in the wilderness (Ex. xxiv. 17), to Ezekiel in the mingled terror and beauty of the chariot and throne and cherubim, and the human form (Ezek. i.); the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds of Bethlehem: at

the Transfiguration it enveloped the chosen Apostles on 'the holy mount': it filled the inward eye of St. John at the miracle of Cana (St. John ii. 11).

Of this glory of God the Son of God is 'the effulgence.' This word has been substituted by the R.V. for the more familiar but less definite 'brightness.' Mere 'brightness' is of many kinds. There is an inherent brightness in the sun, a reflected brightness in the moon or in a mirror. But the 'effulgence' spoken of here is no mere reflection or luminous body, like the face of Moses or the pillar of cloud and of fire at the exodus. It is the actual radiance of light communicating itself to the beholder. Without this 'effulgence' the light would remain unseen and unknowable. The 'effulgence' is as much light and glory as the very source and fount of it is.

It is interesting to notice that this phrase, here applied to the Son of God, is almost identical with one applied to 'Wisdom' in the Book of Wisdom: 'She is the effulgence of the everlasting light' (vii. 26). Thus the Son of God is identified with God's eternal Wisdom, the conception of which, in inspired Jewish thought, grew from an attribute of God to a personal Being, sharing God's eternity and throne, by whom God manifested Himself in creation and makes Himself known to man. (*Cf.* Prov. viii.) So St. John speaks of Him as 'the Word,' and St. Paul, in the beautiful passage 2 Cor. iv. 6, brings together the thoughts of God's Wisdom and God's Word in the creation of the world, the visible 'glory' of the light of the first day, and the revelation of God's invisible glory in His Son: 'It is God, that said, Light shall

shine out of darkness, Who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Following Scripture, the Nicene Creed calls God's Son 'Light from light'—which is but another way of saying that He is 'God from God'—and the Church in one of her earliest hymns adores Him as 'Splendor paternæ gloriæ' ('Brightness of the Father's glory').

'The very image of His substance.'—The important correction of the R.V. should here be noted: 'substance' for person.' God's 'substance' or essence is ineffable and beyond all definition. It is that by which God is God. Moreover, man could by no possibility know this 'substance' unless it were expressed to him by God Himself and by means within man's range of understanding. Now the Son of God is the Divine Person by whom that which may be known of God's essential nature is known. He is the 'very image.' The word in the original is '*character*'—literally a graving tool, and then used both of the features of a graven seal and of the mark made by the seal. In this place the prominent idea is that of the seal itself fixing its impression upon created things. St. Paul speaks of man as being 'the image of God' (1 Cor. xi. 7). But man is this only in the secondary sense. The Son of God is the true image of God's substance, and He has at creation stamped that impress upon man.

But not only did the Son of God make the glory of God to shine into the world, and stamp upon man that Divine image which it was His to bestow: not only is He before the world and above the world, He

is actually in the world. Having created it, He does not leave it, but is 'upholding all things'—more literally, 'bearing' or 'supporting' them towards their goal. And this He does 'by the word of His power'—the expression of a will which needs only to will in order to execute, a will which is omnipotent.

It is evident, without going further, that the object of the writer, in these subtle and remarkable expressions, is to state beyond all misunderstanding the true and perfect Divinity of Christ. The Son of God is not a mere man, not even an angel or archangel. No created being, however exalted, could be rightly described in such words as these. He is a distinct Person in the Unity of the Godhead, equal to and co-eternal with the Father, and yet differing from the Father in being Son and not Father.

To safeguard this fundamental truth we have inherited the Nicene Creed, a weapon forged and tempered in the life-and-death struggles of the fourth century for the Catholic Faith. When the Creed speaks of Christ as the 'only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds'—*i.e.* from all eternity—it is expressing the identical truth conveyed [in the words the 'effulgence of His glory.' He is that personal outpouring of the Godhead which is described in human language in words derived from the relationship of father and son. He was 'begotten,' but not at any moment in time or beyond time. He stands eternally in the relation of Son to God the Father. Again, when the Creed calls Him 'of one substance with the Father; by whom

all things were made,' it is but expounding the words 'the very image of His substance.' And this is He Who suffered on the Cross, Who ascended visibly into the heavens. His sufferings were the act of His own Divine will, one with the Father's will, for the washing away of human sin: His ascension was no mere disappearance from among men, but the assumption of the victor's throne over all creation, which was His by His own indefeasible right, Who, 'when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high' (verse 3).

The writer now proceeds to illustrate this unique dignity of the Son of God by quotations from the Old Testament. It must be remembered in studying them that those to whom the Epistle was addressed were 'Hebrews.' They had recognised as a foundation truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed King, Priest, and Prophet to whom all the prophets bore witness. And the writer's object is to show that those statements in the Old Testament which were admitted already by all to refer to the Messiah could not be adequately explained of any created being nor of anyone less exalted than the Highest.

'Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee' (verse 5). These words of the second Psalm, originally addressed to the typical king of the line of David, celebrating the Divine sanction of his kingdom and his victories over the heathen, point to something greater still, to an intimate relationship between the Messiah and God, which no mere

expression of Divine favour could justify. 'Thou art My *Son*, this day'—either the everlasting day of eternity, or some great earthly day of unveiling, such as the Baptism of Christ or His Transfiguration —'this day have I begotten Thee.' In no earthly king could such words find their full realisation. They point us to the inner mysteries of the Godhead.

Again, the promise to David's seed, 'I will be to him a Father,'[1] would have ended in failure if its fulfilment were not something greater than an earthly kingdom. What the Messiah was in His appointment, that He *ever* will be. 'Unto which of the angels said He at any time' such words as these? By the witness of the Scriptures the Son of God stands on a higher plane than any created being, higher even than those great angels whose intervention gave such awful sanctity to the Old Testament in the eyes of the Jew. (See Acts vii. 53.) Christ has 'inherited a more excellent Name than they' (verse 4). The descriptions of His nature and office in Scripture, an inheritance into which He entered when He came into this world, far exceed anything that is said even of angels.

Again, the coming of Jehovah to judgment—of which the Old Testament is full and which Christians know will be fulfilled in the Second Advent of Christ—what is foretold of *that* day?[2] 'When

[1] 2 Sam. vii. 14, a promise also alluded to in Ps. lxxxix. 19–37.

[2] The identification of this quotation is somewhat difficult, owing to the fact that the writer (unlike St. Paul) usually quotes from the Septuagint version, which often differs materially from the Hebrew. The words occur in that version of Deut. xxxii. 43, and agree with the

He again bringeth in the firstborn into the world He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him' (verse 6).

Nay, contrast what is said of those mighty angels who wait on God's service in the highest earthly employ, in the powers of Nature, the whirlwind and the lightning (verse 7), with what is said of the Messiah in the marriage Psalm (xlv.). *He* is addressed as God; He is enthroned for ever, His kingdom is the vindication of the eternal laws of righteousness. His work is not that of service, but of sovereignty (verses 8, 9).

Once again, He by whom the worlds were made (verse 2) must be identical with the everlasting, self-revealing God of the Old Testament. Does not the Psalmist (Ps. cii.) speak of the strong foundations of the earth, of the ceaseless march of the constellations of heaven as, after all, but transitory compared with the eternal years, the unending rule of Him Who made them? 'They shall perish, but Thou continuest'—'Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail' (verses 10–12).

Lastly, using the same argument with which Christ Himself had confounded the Pharisees, the writer asks who can this be who in the 110th Psalm is invited to share the throne of God, to sit in the place of highest honour waiting the hour when His enemies will be made the 'footstool of His feet' (verse 13). Neither to man nor angel could this be said—but to God only.

sense of Ps. xcvii. 7, where 'Gods' (Elohim) may refer as it sometimes does to the angels.

The same subject, the unique greatness of the Son of God, is returned to in chapter iii. Christ is there set in contrast with Moses, the greatest name under the Old Covenant. Of Moses God said, 'My servant Moses . . . is faithful in all Mine house' (Num. xii. 7). Yet the very words which tell of his dignity imply that his office was one of service, his position that of an individual man within God's house, the spiritual building of the Jewish Church. Moses was neither the author nor the possessor of 'the house of God.' Christ is not a servant, but a Son; He is *over* God's house rather than in it only. His relation to the Christian Church is identical with that of God to the Jewish Church. Just as He has been shown to be lord of angels, so He 'is counted worthy of more honour than Moses.' His is the glory, not of the work, but of the worker—not of the creature, but of the Creator.

It has been already pointed out that this truth is the same which was vindicated in the world-wide conflict of the Catholic Church against the invasions of heathenism. That Christ is truly and perfectly God is vital to the very existence of the Church. Christ Himself plainly laid it down as such. His question 'Whom say ye that I am?' (St. Matt. xvi. 15) is the supreme test of all that claims the Christian name. On the basis of the answer St. Peter gave, the Church was to be built, and eternal continuance was promised to her. It could not be otherwise. If Christ is not God, the whole fabric of Christianity is a delusion. The impassable gulf between the Creator and the creature still remains; God has not

been revealed to us; we can have no certainty of His forgiveness, nor of His mind towards us. Job would still have to cry out, and vainly, for the 'daysman' betwixt God and man to 'lay his hand upon both' (ix. 33). The earth would still be 'given into the hand of the wicked,' nor could there be any certainty of the final triumph of good. Christ Himself could not be claimed as a perfect moral Teacher; for even the Sermon on the Mount rests throughout on the assumption that He Who speaks has a personal authority to do so. He speaks in the Gospels, not merely as a man to his brethren, but as One from above, as the authoritative Lawgiver—nay, more, as the final Judge of mankind, Who will hereafter sit on the throne of glory and allot their eternal rewards to all nations (St. Matt. xxv.).

On this stupendous truth is based all the writer of the Epistle has to offer to the tempted Hebrews for their consolation and their warning. 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' (ii. 3). The Divinity of Christ places the Christian on a different level from all other men. The adherents of other religions, all other seekers after truth, however exalted and pure, are possessors only of a part, the Christian has the whole; they have but shadows and glimpses, the Christian has the reality. All who might be ranged in competition with Him, whether men or angels, must either come to be worshippers of Him, or take their place as His enemies, hereafter to be 'the footstool of His feet'; for Christ is true God, His words are the Words of God, His actions and His sufferings are the actions and sufferings of

God ; from His law there can be no appeal. Rightly, inevitably, has the Church fenced round this charter of her existence by the clear-cut statements of the Creed, and by the title 'Theotokos' ('Mother of God') applied to the Blessed Virgin by the Council of Ephesus (431), and accepted as an unalterable law by the whole Catholic Church.[1]

It was through some failure to rise up to what was implied in the awful greatness of the Son of God that 'the Hebrews' were fainting. Christ did not dominate their lives. They had eyes and ears for the sneers of those about them, for the hardships and puzzles of a life of separation. They had not got that over-mastering sense of the power of Him whose Name they bore, beneath which everything else in the world becomes insignificant, every difficulty a mere mote in the sunbeam.

In our own day, too, it needs to be remembered that the humanity of Christ can be no true source of consolation, except on the basis of His Divinity. When once that supreme truth is grasped—and it can only come to each individual, as it did to St. Peter, by the revelation of the Father—doubts and despondency must be at least on the way to disappear. The world will indeed still be full of unexplained mysteries, but the Godhead of Christ is greater than all these. Just as Job found the solution of his doubts, not in intellectual reasonings, but in being brought face to face with the glory of God (Job xlii. 1–6), as the Psalmist whose 'feet were almost gone' (Ps. lxxiii.) found in the sanctuary of God, in the

[1] See Pearson, *On the Creed*, art. iii. with the notes.

sense of God's greatness and nearness to himself, the answer to the obstinate problem of the prosperity of the wicked, so

> . . . the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it.[1]

Again, in proportion as we learn the lessons of the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews the whole world will be seen and felt to be full of Christ. His impress, His seal and signature, will be recognised upon Nature and upon man. The heavens will declare His glory, and all His works will bless Him, reflecting Him and returning to Him as the wax to the seal, what is truly His. Here is the justification of all true joy that man rightly takes in the study and contemplation and imitation of Nature. Unknown often to themselves, the masters of painting and sculpture have grasped and made permanent the traces of what is akin to man in Nature, akin because both are marked with the same creative impress of the Son of God. They have copied Nature; and yet there was more in the copy, in a sense, than in the original. The copy was the interpretation of the original. It shed over Nature

> The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the poet's dream.[2]

So to the Christian the glory of sunset and the starry skies, the beauty of a flower or the grandeur of mountain and ocean, are full of Christ; gleams of His perfec-

[1] Browning, *A Death in the Desert.*
[2] Wordsworth, *Elegiac Stanzas.*

tions shine in them; 'the word of His power' upholds them. They are full of that inward joy of God with which He 'rejoices in His work.' In the mysterious words of one of the most recently discovered of the legendary sayings of Christ, we have but 'to lift the stone' or 'cleave the wood,' and we find Him. He is everywhere. 'My Father worketh even until now, and I work' (St. John v. 17).

And this impress of the Son of God upon the world reaches a higher beauty in man, in his consciousness, his moral sense, his freedom, his power of progress and aspiration, his power of love—foreshadowings of what man may be when he reaches 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,' when he inherits the 'new heavens and the new earth,' and has Christ's 'new Name' written upon him.

Most precious of all, most earnestly to be vindicated, must the truth of the Godhead of Christ be to the individual soul in its struggles, its temptations, its ideals, its failures. He is 'the Saviour' because—and only because—He is truly God. He is the expression, individual and incommunicable, to each soul, of the Father's mind and purpose. He is the assurance to each sinful soul of forgiveness and to every vanquished soul of restoration and victory.

> Worth while a thousand years of life
> To speak one little word,
> If by our *Credo* we might own
> The Godhead of our Lord.[1]

[1] Faber, *Hymns*, 13.

IV

THE SON OF MAN

How is it conceivable that the eternal God, the maker and ruler of the world, the lord of all the angels, appeared on earth as a poor man, bore a human name, and suffered the death of a slave? This is evidently the problem which underlies the subtle argument of chapter ii. It was the standing difficulty of the Jew as he contemplated the Cross. He found it 'an offence,' a stumbling-block. The astounding paradox that God became perfectly man and lived and died, without ceasing to be perfect God, was no easier to human intellect in the first century than it is in the twentieth. The strange perversions of Christianity which flourished in the early ages of the Church, under the general name of Gnosticism, bear witness to this by their constant endeavours to escape in some fanciful way from the literal truth of the Incarnation, by assuming sometimes two Christs, one Divine and one human, or a Christ whose Divinity was separable from His humanity, or a Christ whose human birth and death were illusions and whose body was only a phantom.

Some misgiving of this sort may have been lurking in the mind of 'the Hebrews.' 'The historic Jesus

Christ in whom we have believed as the Redeemer of Israel—effulgence of the Father's glory, very image of the Father's substance, you say He was and is. How can He have *died*, as we know He did?'

The answer which the writer of the Epistle gives is, broadly speaking, simply this. The Incarnation, with all its attendant humiliation and suffering, was not the lowering of God, but the lifting up of man. It was the necessary path by which man, in the person of the Head of his race, has attained that exaltation which prophecy had already proclaimed to be his. 'For not unto angels did He subject the world to come, whereof we speak' (ii. 5). This new age into which Christians with Christ have entered is to be one in which *man* is, under God, supreme. In the God-man, Christ, *man*, 'made for a little while lower than the angels,' is now 'crowned with glory and honour,' made lord of all things 'because of the suffering of death.' It is the answer which the Athanasian Creed has compressed into one pregnant phrase, 'Not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God.'

And if it be questioned still further, 'How?' or 'Why?' the apostolic answer is given in one significant word. 'It *became* Him,' it was fitting, it was in harmony with the nature and character of God. It was in harmony with all that God had revealed about Himself, with that Name which He proclaimed to Moses, 'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands' (Ex. xxxiv. 6). It was in harmony too with man's own conscience, with what

his own heart tells him, if he will hear it, of the heart and mind of God. A God whose nature is love, and to whom all human faculty of loving bears witness, could not like an autocrat alter man's condition arbitrarily to suit His own will and pleasure, but must deal with man like a lover, entering into his limitations, placing Himself by his side, working out man's salvation under human conditions and by human toil and suffering, 'not ashamed to call them brethren.' No way was so worthy of God as this way, 'the royal way of the Holy Cross,' and therefore it was the only way, for God can only do that which is most worthy of Himself.

> But since the deed is ever prized the more,
> The more the doer's good intent appears;
> Goodness celestial, whose broad signature
> Is on the universe, of all its ways
> To raise ye up, was fain to leave out none.
> Nor aught so vast or so magnificent,
> Either for him who gave or who received,
> Between the last night and the primal day,
> Was or can be. For God more bounty show'd
> Giving Himself to make man capable
> Of his return to life, than had the terms
> Been mere and unconditional release.[1]

In studying the details of the chapter it will be well to consider separately (1) the fact of the Incarnation and what is involved in it, (2) the meaning of the Death of Christ.

(1) The Incarnation, the human conception and birth of the Son of God, is described first in verse 11. 'For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one;' and this is explained in

[1] Dante, *Paradise* vii.

verses 14 and 16. 'Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same . . . not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham.' The Saviour and those whom He saves are 'all of one,' of one common flesh and blood ; they by the necessity of their human origin, He by deliberate will and choice. He partook of all that pertains rightly to man's nature, a human body, a human soul, a human reason. Moreover, to render this unmistakable, to prevent all doubt as to whether it was this same material flesh and blood of ours, and not some ethereal nature of angels or demi-gods which He assumed, He did not, as He conceivably might have done, appear suddenly on the earth in human form, but 'He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham,' He was born in a well-known family and nation, of a human mother.

That this birth was absolutely sinless is stated definitely in iv. 15 ; but it is implied here in the words 'He that sanctifieth,' and it is surely most significant that the writer chooses this word to explain what is meant by the exaltation of man. To bring man to 'glory,' to his ideal state, to put all things under his feet, according to the original purpose of creation (Gen. i. 26, 28), all this was effected by *sanctifying* man, making him *holy*. Holiness in man lies in the correspondence of man's will and nature with God's will and purpose : it is the perfect return of filial obedience and love in answer to a Father's love. Man was made to be holy ; and the Son of God became the Son of Man to effect this.

His human flesh and blood are the source of holiness to all those whom He calls His 'brethren.' And in this holiness, when perfectly realised, all else will be included; man will have attained the fulness of his glorious destiny.

To illustrate further what is involved in the union of God and man in the Incarnation, the writer gives three typical quotations from the Old Testament. The first significantly enough is taken from the great Psalm of the Passion (xxii.). There the Sufferer speaks of His mysterious agonies as being the birth-throes of some new brotherhood of mankind, a 'great congregation' in which a new and acceptable worship will be offered to the Father. The Psalm is fulfilled in Christ. He has so identified Himself with mankind that He can truly call them 'brethren,' and assume the position of *fellow-worshipper* with them.

> I will declare Thy name unto my brethren,
> In the midst of the congregation will I sing Thy praise.

Worship of God is the true end of man: it is the son's offering to the common Father. So our Lord showed His identity of nature with man by actually on earth praying, taking part in the religious worship of home, synagogue and temple, keeping the Passover with His disciples as the head of the family, and by the inauguration of 'the newer Rite,' fulfilling the Passover 'in the kingdom of God.' So again after His Resurrection He calls His disciples 'brethren,' and declares to them for the first time the Name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (St. Matt. xxviii. 10, 19).

Again, Christ has associated Himself with man as a *fellow-believer*. 'I will put my trust in Him' (ii. 13) —words that occur more than once in the Old Testament, notably in Ps. xviii. 2, the psalm of the victor, the king who triumphs over God's enemies in the power of love and trust in God, his 'rock' and 'shield,' 'the horn of his salvation.' This psalm again is fulfilled in the Son of Man, in Him Who endured to the uttermost in the strength of such a consolation as this, 'I am not alone, because the Father is with Me' (St. John xvi. 32); Who even in his darkest moment could still cry out 'My God'; Who voluntarily closed His life with the words, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.' Now faith in God is essentially a *human* virtue; and that Christ shared in it, and expressed it in its most perfect form, shows that He had not only a human body but a perfect human soul.

A third and more difficult quotation follows: 'Behold, I and the children which God hath given me.' These are the words of the prophet Isaiah, who, with his mystically named children, stands forth at a crisis in the history of the people of God as representative of the true Israel, of that 'soul of the Church' which held fast to the Divine promises, and neither feared a foreign foe nor desired a foreign alliance (Isaiah viii. 18). Isaiah and his children are typical, so it is implied, of the relationship of 'The Captain of our Salvation' to them who are associated with Him. He is not only their Brother but also their Father, the source of their new life, the giver of their new name, and of one nature with them. He is

truly 'Our fair Father, Christ.'[1] So Isaiah had called Him 'the Father of Eternity,' which the Vulgate suggestively renders 'the Father of the world to come' (Isaiah ix. 6).

These three quotations illustrate the perfect humanity of Christ, just as the quotations in chapter i. illustrated His essential Divinity. The second and third of them are not at first sight quotations which we should naturally select from the Old Testament as predictive of Christ. Their fitness depends upon a conception of the Old Testament which is not the most familiar to modern thought, but is nevertheless profoundly true. The Old Testament is not a collection of ancient literature in which we may find or refuse to find isolated prophecies of Christ. It is a many-sided human record, which not only because it is 'inspired,' but because it is human, is, as it were, in travail with Christ. Just as hints and intimations of the coming of man are scattered among the generations of lower forms that preceded him,[2] so Christ is seen and heard, 'by divers portions and in divers manners,' in the words and acts of the typical characters of the Old Testament. He legislates in Moses, and worships in David, and is steadfast in Isaiah, and agonises in Job. The imperfect and partial strains ever upwards and demands the perfect.

(2) The Incarnation issued in the Passion. In the words of the Book of Wisdom,[3] the righteous 'with outrage and torture' was 'put to the test,' and

[1] Tennyson, *Guinevere*. [2] See Browning, *Paracelsus* v.

[3] Wisdom ii. 19, 20, one of the most remarkable predictions of Christ found in the Apocryphal books.

'condemned to a shameful death.' Similarly the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the Passion as the 'making perfect' of Christ (ii. 10) 'through sufferings.' His human nature, morally sinless and endued with all grace from the moment of His conception, was tested in every conceivable manner, and in every point found perfect. In identifying Himself with man, He left no depth of suffering unassayed, He passed through the very darkest experiences that a human body and soul can touch. He endured the extreme of bodily pain, the desertion of friends, the ingratitude of those He loved, the loss of all human comfort in the companionship of the Father and the Holy Spirit, even the last agony of the separation of soul and body in death. From all He emerged in triumph, and wears the crown of eternal victory.

Certain results inevitably follow from the Passion thus understood. He 'tasted death for every man' (ii. 9), not indeed instead of every man, but for every man's sake.[1] All mankind are involved in His struggle and His victory. And He has brought 'to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil' (ii. 14). The enemy of God had been permitted in God's wisdom to transform death from what it would be by nature, the undreaded passing from one stage of blessedness to another and a higher, into a terror, a dark and crushing necessity, a penal separation from life and joy. This power, this 'sting of death,' has been brought to nought by the voluntary death of the Lord, and is on its way to

[1] The Greek preposition used is ὑπὲρ, 'for the sake of,' not ἀντί, 'instead of.'

disappear utterly. That age-long dread, that final and inexplicable curse which had put human life in bondage, is taken away. 'The snare is broken, and we are delivered.'

And once again, by these sufferings in soul and body the Son of God has attained a perfect human sympathy, not only in will, which was His from all eternity, but by veritable experience (ii. 17, 18). This thought leads the way to the central subject of the Epistle, the high-priesthood of Christ, which is first touched upon at the end of chapter ii., and more fully developed in chapters iv. 14–vii.

The Incarnation has ever been not only the Rock on which the Church is built, but the 'stone of stumbling' for the world. The river of human life and thought dashes against it, and is parted, parted for ever. Each man as he meets it must turn either to the right hand or to the left. And whatever in our own day may help us to choose aright and to understand more clearly the truth on which the world even now is being judged, must be indeed a 'consolation.' The teaching of the Epistle before us is singularly suggestive.

First of all, do not many modern doubts and hesitations as to the central teaching of Christianity arise from an unworthy idea of God? We are only just escaping even now from the mists of error with which Calvinism obscured the Atonement; and what is all-essential to grasp is just this—that the motive power of the Incarnation, and therefore of the Atonement, was a Father's love, the love of Him 'for whom

are all things and through whom are all things.' Who is the 'lover of souls' (Wisd. xi. 26), and has 'a desire to the work of His hands' (Job xiv. 15). It is perhaps the noblest contribution that Robert Browning has made to religious thought that he has over and over again, as in 'Saul,' or the 'Epistle of Karshish,' compelled us to consider the reasonableness of the Incarnation, the testimony that man's own nature on its better side bears not to its likelihood only but even to its necessity. And in the magnificent climax of 'Easter Day' he has touched even a more daring note. Man, he seems to say, could not have *invented* the story of the Incarnation and the Passion, for if he had, and it were not true, man would be greater than God.

> Remembering every moment Who,
> Beside creating thee unto
> These ends, and these for thee, was said
> To undergo death in thy stead
> In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
> What doubt in thee could countervail
> Belief in it? Upon the ground
> 'That in the story had been found
> Too much love! How could God love so?'
> . . . . .
> Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,
> Both could and did invent that scheme
> Of perfect love: 'twould well beseem
> Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
> Not tally with God's usual ways!

If worthy thoughts of God compel us to a belief in the Incarnation, does not that in its turn help us to worthier thoughts of man? The perfect humanity of Christ is as essential to the Catholic Faith as His Divinity. The Church was just as stern in repress-

ing the mistaken reverence with which Eutyches, in the fifth century, tried to exalt the Divine nature of Christ at the expense of His humanity, as in condemning the profanity of Arius in the fourth. That God truly has become man, that God wears for ever that human flesh which He took of the very substance of the Virgin Mary, His mother—what illumination does this cast forward and backward upon the history of our race, deepening, indeed, awfully the shadows of sin and failure, but lightening every upward effort with an undying hope! Deeper than all in mankind that moves our sorrow, our anger, our impatience, or our ridicule, there is the supreme fact that this very human nature, in all its width and depth, has been entered into, appropriated, raised to glory already by the Son of God. 'Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be' (1 John iii. 2).

Lastly, in the face of the final mysteries of our mortal state, is it not true that pain and death have been deeply, fundamentally altered by the Passion of Christ? It would be idle to deny that they still exist, that they are still awful and mysterious. Death is still to every man the penalty of sin; it is still the entrance into the region untried and unthinkable; it is the end of opportunity as we know it, and the beginning of judgment. It is, it must ever be, as Bishop Butler said in his last moments, 'an awful thing to appear face to face before the Moral Governor of the world.' It is impossible to gloze over the grim aspect of death by the forced brightness so popular at present-day funerals. Neither saints'-day hymns

nor heaps of costly flowers can cover up the grave, nor drown the passing-bell. And yet, is there not a difference to the Christian in the face of the Cross? Death cannot be to him the 'eternal exile' of the Roman poet. The Lord of all things has Himself passed through it; the power of His sacrifice is not stayed by the gates of death, the Church's intercession takes in the dead as well as the living. The very earliest inscriptions on Christian tombs testify to the change that has passed upon man's outlook into the future: 'In peace'; 'In Christ'; 'Mayest thou live in God'; 'Holy souls, remember us'; 'Mayest thou live in peace, and pray for us.'

To take the very highest pattern of pagan death, is there not a subtle difference between Socrates drinking 'the chilly hemlock' among his sorrowing friends, and vowing his tribute to the God of Healing, who was setting him free from the disease of life, and Bishop Fisher on the scaffold, opening his Bible at the words 'This is life eternal,' or Archbishop Laud amidst a crowd of enemies, praying his last prayer, 'Lord, I am coming as fast as I can. I know I must pass through the shadow of death before I can come to see Thee. But it is but *umbra mortis*, a mere shadow of death, a little darkness upon nature; but Thou by Thy merits and Passion hast broke through the jaws of death'? These are eloquent types on the heroic scale, but there is a greater witness still in the unknown agonies borne patiently in the spirit of sonship by countless Christians; in the pains of separation from those who were loved as only Christians can love, endured in steadfast hope. This

witness grows in power every generation that passes, a witness that it was no mere figure of speech which told of the deliverance from the terror of death, but that in very deed and truth He Who is Son of God and Son of man has 'tasted death for every man,' and 'brought to nought him that had the power of death.'

V

THE ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST

THE consideration of the true Godhead and the perfect manhood of Jesus Christ leads the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews directly to his central thought. 'Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people' (ii. 17). Once the key-word 'high priest' is reached the idea is never dropped. The writer returns to it again and again (iii. 1, iv. 14, v., vi. 20, vii., viii. 1, ix. 11, x. 21). It is not, indeed, the only significant title which is applied in this Epistle to our Lord. Other aspects of the Incarnation are implied in such remarkable phrases as 'the Apostle of our confession'[1] (iii. 1); 'the author and perfecter of our faith'[2] (xii. 2); 'the great shepherd of the sheep'[3] (xiii. 20). But it is the high priesthood of

[1] The One whom Christians acknowledge in their profession of faith as the one perfect messenger sent from the Father, and from whom all other apostleship takes its value. *Cf.* St. John xx. 21.

[2] See p 128.

[3] The phrase implies the present rule and guidance and nourishment of the Christian flock by the living Christ, from whom the under-shepherds receive their authority. *Cf.* St. John xxi. 15–17.

the Incarnate which is the special contribution of the Epistle to Christian thought. It is to this that the writer evidently refers when he tells his readers that what he has to say of Christ is 'hard of interpretation,' that it is 'solid food' which needs those who have 'experience of the word of righteousness' to be able to partake of (v. 11–14).

Whoever precisely these 'Hebrews' may have been, the fact that they are 'Hebrews' is enough to suggest to us the special fitness of such teaching. Of all the consolations needed by Jewish Christians, while the Temple was still standing, none could be more keenly desired than something to take the place of the priesthood of their former religion. It was a fundamental institution. 'Under it' (the Levitical priesthood), or rather 'upon the basis of it,'[1] 'hath the people received the law' (vii. 11). This priesthood, of which the high priest was the head and sum, was the living link between God and man. On its continuance depended all possibility of covenanted intercourse with God. It was the keystone supporting all the fabric of sacrifice and propitiation. Upon it hinged both Jewish Church and Jewish State. By its side, even the kingship seemed but an incident of history. And since the exile the kingship was gone; no son of David, as Jeremiah had foretold (xxii. 30), sat any more upon the throne of David. The prophetic office, which had existed side by side with the priesthood, and often overshadowed it, was gone also, or in abeyance. The high priesthood was left alone to represent the ancient

[1] ἐπ' αὐτῆς.

glories of Israel, and to bear witness to the Divine purpose in the national continuance of Israel.

With what feelings of reverence and exultation the later Jews looked upon the high priesthood can be seen in such descriptions as that of Simon, son of Onias, in Ecclus. l. 5–21.

> How glorious was he when the people gathered round him
> At his coming forth out of the sanctuary!
> As the morning star in the midst of a cloud,
> As the moon at the full:
> As the sun shining forth upon the Temple of the most High,
> And as the rainbow giving light in clouds of glory.

And still before the eyes of the Hebrew Christians this high priesthood went on in the solemn beauty of its sacred acts, with something of its ancient mystery and grandeur. Still the daily incense smoked, still year by year the high priest entered the Holy of holies with blood to make atonement for Israel's sin, and to re-consecrate the approach to the mercy-seat of God. But from all this Christians were excluded.

Now, in the consolation which the holy writer offers to 'the Hebrews' for this deprivation there are two very remarkable points. First, he does not tell them that priesthood is abolished, or that it belonged to the world's childhood. On the contrary, he assures them that it still exists, that it is at least as essential a part of their Christian confession as the Aaronic priesthood was in the Jewish Church. And secondly, in explaining to them what this Christian priesthood means, he does not take as its type the limited and national priesthood of the Law, but something older and simpler, the natural, ethnic priesthood of Melchizedek, the priesthood which is as

wide as humanity, and before which even Abraham had bowed in reverence.

To return to the first point. Priesthood is no transitory thing, but of the very essence of God's redemptive purpose; sacerdotalism is the very core of Christianity. The purpose of the Incarnation is that He Who bears the human name 'Jesus' may be 'a merciful and faithful high priest.' What is priesthood? It involves, by whatever name it is called, authorised mediation between God and man, by man. A priest is one who represents his brethren before God, reconciles God to them and them to God; he is one who presents before God the offering of man, who distributes to man the gifts of God. And this is exactly what the Lord Jesus was and is. He is the 'great high priest,' 'merciful' to man, 'faithful' to God; He makes propitiation to God for the sins of the people; He ministers 'grace and mercy' to men His brethren.[1]

Two necessary qualifications for this priestly office are laid down in chapter v.—a Divine call, and human sympathy. 'No man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God' (v. 4). True priesthood involves the assurance that its ministry is acceptable, that it is not a piece of human presumption, but a gift of Divine mercy. And Christ has been so called and appointed by God: 'Thou art My Son' (v. 5), not only as consubstantial with the Father, but as head and first-born of the human race. He has entered into the inheritance of that Divine call

[1] See *Holy Orders*, c. iv., in the Oxford Library of Practical Theology.

which had been already expressed in David's Psalm, 'Thou art a priest for ever' (v. 6). The same Divine person, that is, Who is bidden in the Psalm to sit on the right hand of God, is marked out by God as eternally a priest.

Again, he who is to be the priest of his brethren must be able to sympathise, to 'bear gently with the ignorant and erring' (v. 2). The earthly high priest had to learn his sympathy from his own liability to fall, and the law reminded him of it, by bidding him first offer sacrifice for his own sins (v. 2). With Christ, human sympathy is on a higher plane. He is without sin, He has no need to offer for Himself (vii. 27). Yet He has vouchsafed to learn sympathy by passing through the whole range of human temptation and agony. This is one of the favourite thoughts of the Epistle. It was no phantom of suffering nor fiction of learning. He 'offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears' (v. 7). He wept over Jerusalem, He felt the strain of inward agony in Gethsemane, He cried out in His desolation on the Cross. By each new suffering He 'learned' to obey, not as we men learn obedience, struggling and resisting, and withal so imperfectly, but learning in the filial spirit of the sinless heart, which accepts perfectly each experience of suffering with 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.'

Hence from this point of view also we have the assurance of an accepted priesthood. He was 'heard for his godly fear.'[1] His filial reverence and obedience have won the Father's heart. Thus He is 'the

[1] εὐλάβεια.

author of eternal salvation' to 'all them that obey Him' (v. 9), for what love has won love has the right to give. The priesthood of Christ is the ground, therefore, of Christian hope, a hope which we have fled from the storms of life to lay hold of, nay more, a hope which actually holds us fast, an anchor in the unseen (vi. 18–20).

But this priesthood of Christ is 'after the order of Melchizedek.' Chapter vii., one of the most remarkable passages in the Bible, interprets the meaning of the one appearance of Melchizedek in history (Gen. xiv.), and the one significant allusion to him by David (Ps. cx.). Melchizedek, 'king of righteousness,' is the first priest mentioned in Scripture. He was a monotheist, possessor of the knowledge of the one true God, a knowledge saved from among the wrecks of Eden, and only gradually corrupted into polytheism and idolatry. He worshipped God under the name of 'El Elyon,' 'God most High,' whom Abraham recognises not as a mere tribal divinity, but as 'possessor of heaven and earth,' the same as the God of his own worship. The priest-king meets Abraham returning from smiting the kings, and offers him refreshment of bread and wine, probably part of a sacrificial banquet.[1] Abraham pays him reverence, and offers him tithes of the spoils; the father of the chosen line accepts the blessing of one who is representative of the Gentile world, of that natural priest-

[1] Like the 'meal-offering,' or 'pure offering' (minchah) of the daily Aaronic service (Ex. xxix. 40). This in all probability, like most of the Mosaic ordinances, was not a new institution, but an ancient and traditional act of worship, adopted and sanctioned by the Holy Spirit in the Law.

hood which is one of the universal institutions of primitive man. Just as behind the Law was the promise, behind the covenant of works the principle of faith (*cp.* Rom. iv., Gal. iii.), so behind the glories of the priesthood of Aaron looms the greater glory of Melchizedek, of a priesthood which knows no limitations of race or family, which seems to represent the original and ideal relationship between God and man.

It is to this priesthood, rather than the limited and temporary priesthood of the sons of Aaron, that Christ is heir, as the 110th Psalm declares: 'After the likeness of Melchizedek, there ariseth another priest, who hath been made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life' (vii. 15, 16).

The point which the writer specially seizes upon in the description of Melchizedek is the *eternity* of his priesthood, in contrast with the succession of dying men who, one by one, fulfilled for their brief moment of life the Aaronic office. He sees this eternity foreshadowed even in the silences of Scripture. There is no genealogy given of Melchizedek, he is 'without father, without mother,' as far as the record goes. We are not told whence he sprang, nor whither he went. Mysteriously he comes, and mysteriously he departs. His momentary appearance is like a glimpse of the eternal world, he 'abideth a priest continually.'

And it is this feature which is emphasised in the Messianic Psalm, and confirmed by the oath of God. 'The Lord sware, and will not repent Himself, Thou art a priest for ever.'

The promise is fulfilled in Him Who sprang not of

the tribe of Levi, but of the royal tribe of Judah. 'He, because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable' (vii. 24). It is clear that the writer is here assuming that to which he has never yet directly alluded, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death had no power over 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah.' His life was indissoluble, the grave could not hold Him. And it is this new principle of life, which thus came into human nature and triumphed over death, which gives the inward power and efficacy of the new priesthood 'after the order of Melchizedek.'

The Resurrection was crowned by the Ascension. Christ is 'a priest for ever' on the throne of God. He has entered 'within the veil,' 'passed through the heavens,' is 'made higher than the heavens,' in order that He may continually exercise this sure priesthood of humanity. Like Melchizedek, He is a priest in blessing, His throne is 'the throne of grace' (iv. 16), He dispenses from it mercy for past transgressions, and 'grace to help in time of need.' Like Aaron, He is a priest in intercession. That great feature of the priestly office which was symbolised by the names of the twelve tribes on the stones of the breastplate and the ephod has been taken up into the eternal office of Christ. Like Aaron, He stands between the dead and the living, and to Him the destroyer gives place (Wisdom xviii. 23–25).

We are not, then, to think of the work of Christ for man's salvation as only concerned with the three-and-thirty years of His earthly life. Though the very garment which He wore, 'without seam, woven from

the top throughout' (St. John xix. 23), was, as St. John plainly suggests, symbolical of priesthood (Ex. xxviii. 31, 32), yet it was a priesthood not merely to be exercised on the Cross, but eternal in the heavens (*cp.* Rev. i. 13). 'He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them' (vii. 25).

And 'such a high priest became us' (vii. 26). Even as there was an inherent fitness, a harmony with the character of God, in the redemption of man through the sufferings of the Son of man (ii. 10), so there is a perfect harmony between the needs of humanity and the priesthood of Him Who, by His very presence in heaven in human flesh, is the intercessor for man. His is the sympathy not only of a perfect human experience, but of one who is 'holy,' to make atonement for man's lack of the love of God, 'guileless' to intercede for human deceits and self-deceivings, 'separated from sinners and made higher than the heavens,' that we might know that there is no conceivable bar between Him and the Father's heart.

We might, perhaps, have expected that the writer would carry his argument a step further, that he would point out in what ways this eternal and ever-active priesthood is being brought into living touch with man. Such, however, is not his method. He does not speak of the temporal mission of the Holy Ghost, nor of the Sacraments, except by implication, nor, except incidentally, of the Christian ministry. Yet he has laid deep and strong the

necessary foundation, on which these other truths can alone be based. That he did not speak of a delegated priesthood in the Church was, perhaps, inevitable so long as the Jewish priesthood still remained. It was enough that he should supply the premises from which the reasonable conclusion was sure to be drawn. And it is a significant fact that from the end of the second century at the latest, the Church unhesitatingly began to apply sacerdotal titles to her ministry.[1] Bishops and presbyters were called high priests and priests, and the deacon a Levite. The great act of Christian worship, even earlier than this, had quite naturally been called 'the sacrifice,' and the table of the Lord an 'altar.' So far from this phraseology implying a relapse into heathen or Jewish ideas, or being a detraction from the one priesthood of Christ, it shows that men had learned the lesson of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that they were realising to the full what the promises and gifts of Christ really involved.

The subject is, unhappily, a controversial one, but it seems certain that the more fully Christians grasp the present fact of the eternal priesthood of Christ, and its necessary connection with such words as these: 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you,' or 'Lo, I am with you all the days,' the more they will realise the essentially *sacerdotal* character of the ministry of the Church. Christ has not appointed men merely as preachers, but as effectual 'ministers of a new covenant' (2 Cor. iii. 6), as those who minister to their brethren by His authority the grace

[1] See *Holy Orders*, pp. 281–2.

and the healing which He gives, who, in the power of His endless life, present the Eucharistic intercessions of His Church.

And, on the other hand, it seems clear that in proportion as the priesthood on earth of Christ's ministers is ignored or disparaged, the heavenly priesthood of Christ is belittled also. The Christian Gospel, from being a living matter of this present time, is pushed back into the past. Christ is represented as if He were a priest once on the Cross, and for ever afterwards rested in heavenly inactivity. The attempt to be over-spiritual, to liberate the faith of the individual from what, after all, are Divine institutions, the Church, the ministry, the sacraments, has led to sentimentalism and unreality, and so finally to that materialism which is the nemesis of Protestantism.

The consolations of the eternal priesthood of Christ were not merely for those who were regretting the Jewish or the heathen sacerdotal systems. They are for all time and grow with time. Nothing else can bridge the separation between man and God. The mysteries of human life have not decreased with the pushing forward of the boundaries of scientific knowledge. The wider outlook over the different fields of human thought and activity which the past century has opened has not brought comfort to the soul of man. Increase of knowledge has rather brought increase of sorrow. Successes have deepened the sense of failure; advance has shown more of the illimitable field of what is not known and can never be

known. Man is ever driven back upon himself and finds no anodyne. Passion and desire, however noble their objects, fail to satisfy, and cannot be satisfied. Man has thrown down his ancient beliefs, and tried to shake himself free from what seemed fetters of the spirit's freedom ; and with what result ?

> I falter where I firmly trod,
> And falling with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar stairs,
> That slope thro' darkness up to God,
>
> I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
> And gather dust and chaff.[1]

But the Christian knows that beyond that darkness is enthroned the eternal Priest. Humanity in all the fulness of its gifts and powers, humanity raised to the height of the Divine ideal, is in Him united to God, lifting hands of prevailing intercession. There on the throne of the universe beats the heart of the Priest, the heart that yearns to bestow itself upon humanity, to save 'to the uttermost' all that draw near. And this is a consolation which strongly appeals to the individual soul. Indeed, there is, perhaps, no word in Scripture which has sounded more graciously through the ages, to men overburdened with themselves, than the verse of this Epistle which assures us that 'we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are' (iv. 15). But we do not always feel how that consolation is clenched by the words that follow, 'yet without sin.' Perhaps it has even seemed to us in our

[1] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lv.

foolishness that such addition in some way weakens the reality, the nearness to us of the sympathy of Christ. But to whom do we go ourselves on earth for sympathy? to the weak or to the strong? It is not in proportion as our brethren have fallen under the strain of temptation that we feel them able to help us, but just in proportion as they have endured when they were tried.

And, again, no one, as it has well been said, who has yielded to the stress of temptation can ever have known its full force.[1] Only the victor can know *that.* Jesus Christ, because, and only because, He was tempted in all points, yet sinned not, 'is able to save to the uttermost.' It is only in that He 'hath suffered, being tempted,' that 'He is able to succour them that are tempted' (ii. 18). It is the love which suffers, and not the weakness which fails, that is able to help us.

A perfect sympathy, and a perfect power to succour the tempted, are things that touch our separate lives at every point, for every moment of consciousness brings its alternative of good or evil, of a lower or a higher. Temptation is the inevitable and awful privilege of humanity,

> Life's business being just the terrible choice.[2]

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[1] See the remarkable notes of Bishop Westcott on this passage.

[2] Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, x. 1238.

VI

THE ONE OFFERING

THE High Priesthood of Christ leads by a necessary sequence of thought to His Sacrifice. The two ideas are correlative. One is meaningless without the other. 'Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices' (*i.e.* both the offerings which did not involve the shedding of blood and those which did), 'wherefore it is necessary that this high priest also should have somewhat to offer' (viii. 3). The purpose of sacrifice is bound up with the purpose of priesthood, with the reconciliation and the communion of God and man. 'A sacrifice,' says St. Augustine, 'is any work that is performed to enable us to be joined to God in holy fellowship.'[1] This is a fuller and wider conception than is usually attached to the word 'sacrifice,' but it is an essential one. We must not narrow down sacrifice to the mere idea of averting God's wrath: it implies the renewal of love, of the filial relationship of Father and child; as such it is the characteristic work of the Mediator, of Him Who is both Son of God and Son of man.

It is well, in dealing with a matter so deep and inexpressibly solemn as this, to look closely to the actual statements of Holy Scripture. Misunder-

[1] *De Civ. Dei*, x. 6.

standings, unworthy perversions of the truth of the sacrifice of Christ, have done much, alas! to divide the Church, and to alienate men's hearts from the Gospel.

What, then, does our Epistle actually say of the sacrifice of Christ? It is described in several ways. 'He offered up Himself' (vii. 27; *cp.* ix. 26), He 'offered Himself without blemish unto God' (ix. 14). Again His 'blood' is spoken of as being the offering (ix. 12, 25), also His 'body' (x. 10). Clearly all these expressions convey the idea of the surrender of *life*. Especially is *blood* the most sacred symbol of life in the Old Testament (Gen. ix. 4, &c.). It was a perfect and spotless human life which was offered to the Father. And it was offered by Him Who alone could have the right to offer it. The Creator and Lord of life alone could say, what would have been blasphemous on the lips of any creature, 'I have power [right, *margin*] to lay it down' (St. John x. 18). Moreover, it was 'through the Eternal Spirit' (ix. 14) that Christ offered Himself. This mysterious expression is generally thought to point not so much to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, as to the Divine nature of Christ. 'God is a Spirit.' It was through no temporal or limited exercise of a mere human will that Christ offered Himself, but by the eternal and unlimited working of His Divinity, even as elsewhere He is spoken of as 'the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. xiii. 8); and though the Godhead cannot suffer, yet He Who was true God offered *Himself*, for He is one Christ, one person, just as His blessed mother is

'Theotokos,' 'Mother of God.' Thus we find elsewhere in Scripture such wonderful expressions as 'crucifying the Lord of Glory' (1 Cor. ii. 8) and God purchasing the Church 'with His own blood' (Acts xx. 28). A human life, human blood, a human body were Christ's offering, but they were the life, the blood, and the body of God. God offered them. God received them.

This sacrifice was consummated in the death on the Cross, in which was gathered together all the life of filial surrender, all the 'prayers and supplications' of the great High Priest, His 'strong crying and tears' (v. 7), His agonies known and unknown.

> A hundred threads are interwrought
> In it—the thirty years and three,
> The bitter travail of the Tree.[1]

It is plain that we have here a further and even deeper explanation of the Passion and death of Christ than that which was most prominent in chapter ii. There the leading thought was that Christ suffered that He might win a perfect human sympathy; though the closing verses suggested what is now made clear, that Christ suffered to make atonement for human sin. He suffered that He might reconcile God and man, that He might perform, in deed and truth and for ever, all that the old sacrifices (of the heathen as well as the Jews) had foreshadowed and suggested. And the results of this self-oblation are manifold: the removal of the burden of sin from man's conscience (ix. 14), the establishment of a new

[1] Archbishop Alexander, *Poems*, 'Music or Words.'

and better covenant between God and man (ix. 15), the possibility of human sanctification and perfection (x. 10, 14).

Such are the plain statements of Holy Scripture. It is good to rest in them, as the Church has ever done, with reverence and thankfulness, without seeking to explain the inexplicable, or to pry into 'the secret things' which 'belong to the Lord our God.' 'How and in what particular way,' says Bishop Butler, Christ's sacrifice 'had this efficacy, there are not wanting persons who have endeavoured to explain; but I do not find that the Scripture has explained it.'

One other aspect of our Lord's sacrifice is suggested in chapter x. The 40th Psalm had mysteriously hinted that something deeper, more inward than the sacrifices of the law (though these were commanded by God), was really needed in God's sight for the redemption of man, for bringing him 'out of the horrible pit, out of the mire and clay.' The ancient sacrifices had, indeed, taught that life must be surrendered—'apart from shedding of blood there is no remission'—but the Psalm speaks of something more than that, more than any material gift, or the offering of any created life, something in which God would even 'have pleasure.'

> In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
> Thou hadst no pleasure.
> Then said I, Lo, I am come—
> To do Thy will, O God!

The inner principle of the sacrifice of Christ, therefore, was the perfect surrender of human will. It was

the will in its freedom which marked man's exalted nature; it was the perversion of that freedom which had degraded man to the lowest. It is the will, indeed, which is still for each of us our most obstinate and bosom enemy, even as it is the most godlike of our powers. And the Son of God has overcome our will, not by compulsion, but by a perfect use of it, uniting it perfectly with the Divine will. It was this doing of the Father's will which abolished the ancient sacrifices. With the vindication of the inward principle of a surrendered will the outward types passed away. 'He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second' (x. 9). And this again has restored man to his inheritance as a son of God, 'By which will we have been sanctified' (x. 10).

Dare we go a step further than this? Indeed we may; for Holy Scripture tells us not only that 'God is Spirit,' but that 'God is love.' Whatever precise meaning we may attach to the expression 'through the Eternal Spirit' (ix. 14), it is clear that the motive power which moved this self-oblation of our Lord was the love which is the characteristic of the Divine nature, the love which binds the Three Persons of the Trinity in One God. Love it is, therefore, which is the secret of the sacrifice, love which made the Son of God the high priest of humanity, love which made Him do always such things as pleased the Father, love which prompted Him to enter into and make His own all the sufferings and the failure of man's fallen state. Further than this we cannot go; indeed, we need not. But we can see in the light of the obedience of the Son of God that it is

love which can rule free will without interfering with its freedom, love which will be able to reconcile that last contradiction, man's free will and God's omnipotence.

The writer insists often on the *oneness* of this sacrifice. In contrast with the daily ministration of the Jewish priests (x. 11), or with the annual entry of the high priest into the Holy of holies (ix. 25), Christ has offered His sacrifice 'once for all' (ix. 26, x. 10, 14). It is one only, because the Incarnation is one. Christ needs no more to repeat His sacrifice than again to be born of Mary. His sacrifice comes 'at the end of the ages,' it closes the preparatory stage of this world's history. It opens the new and final era of 'things to come.'

But the distinction between the sacrifices of the Law and the sacrifice of Christ is not merely numerical, in that they were many and this is one. The two are different in kind. The former had no real efficacy at all. They were temporary expedients allowed by God; a 'remembrance of sins' rather than the obliteration of them. They were external, appealing to the imagination, they could not really cleanse the conscience. The sacrifice of Christ is absolutely efficacious, it is the 'putting away' of sin. It covers all the past as well as the future. It atones for 'the transgressions that were under the first covenant' (ix. 15).

Again, if the sacrifice of Christ is in this sense *one*, it must also be *permanent*. It was offered once in time, but it lasts on continuously. Christ is a high priest for ever, and so He offered 'one sacrifice

for sins for ever'[1] (x. 12). This great act, accomplished once for all under conditions of space and time, and of which it was said on the Cross, 'It is finished,' is not merely an event in history to which we look back with gratitude, it is a living, energising fact. It has passed into the eternal order. It is spoken of as a living thing with a continual voice in the ear of God,—'the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel' (xii. 24). In the Mosaic sacrifices (a fact which is often overlooked) it was not so much in the actual slaying of the victim that the sacrifice consisted, as in the *subsequent* sprinkling of its blood by the priest.

The language of the Epistle to the Hebrews inevitably suggests the mysterious words with which our Lord instituted the great Sacrament of the Eucharist. There can be little doubt that the writer had in his mind our Lord's words in which He spoke of the bread as His body, 'given' or 'broken' for man's sake; of the cup as His blood of 'the new covenant' which was being 'poured out for the remission of sins.'

Does it not seem clear that our Lord, in bidding His Church perform this action 'for the remembrance' of Him, was teaching the very truth in question—the continuity of His sacrifice? As a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, He Himself perpetually offers the completed sacrifice, and He commands His Church to join with Him in this priestly action.

It is significant also, although never expressly

[1] εἰς τὸ διηνεκές.

mentioned, that the gifts of Melchizedek were bread and wine, and that bread and wine were an invariable accompaniment of the burnt-offering of the Law.[1]

Another fact drawn from the ancient ritual of sacrifice will further illustrate this mysterious truth. The sacrificial action required for its completion the eating by priest and worshipper of a portion of the victim's flesh. Thus the altar was called 'a table,' it was the table of God, and the table of the worshippers. It was the meeting-point of God and man, where the mutual fellowship between God and man was cemented. Is not this the clue to the words, 'Take, eat; This is My body'?

These different lines of thought bring us inevitably to consider the Church's ancient doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Not only is there no inconsistency between this doctrine and the language of the Epistle, but the language rightly understood in relation to the Old Testament gives the necessary foundation for the doctrine.

The Eternal High Priest is even now presenting before the Father the one offering of Himself, performing the reality of which the sprinkling of the victim's blood in the ancient ritual was the type. When the minister of the Catholic Church repeats the words and actions of Christ at the Last Supper, he is, by Christ's own commandment, joining (and the worshippers with him) in this perpetual and heavenly offering. He is presenting not *a* sacrifice, but *the* Sacrifice, for there is only one, and there never could be another either in Jewish times or in Christian.

[1] See p. 59.

It will be seen also from what has already been said that there is no valid distinction to be drawn between an 'altar' and a 'table' in the Christian Church.[1] The Lord's table is a table only because it is an altar. There is communion because there is sacrifice. The two ideas must certainly have been united in the writer's mind, or he would hardly have written, 'We have an altar, whereof they have no right to *eat* that serve the tabernacle' (xiii. 10). This verse requires some further explanation. The emphasis in the first clause is on the word 'have.' The writer seems to be saying, 'So far from being excluded from the sacrificial feasts of the Jewish religion, we Christians actually *have* an altar as a present fact, which conveys higher privileges than anything under the Law. *There*, even the priesthood, "those that serve the tabernacle," had no right to eat of the most solemn of the sin-offerings, that of the Day of Atonement, a fact which in itself suggested that there was no true reconciliation of God and man. But we Christians may eat of the true sin-offering, communicate in that sacrifice which is valid for the putting away of sins.' It is really impossible to explain this verse without reference to the Eucharist. To say that the 'altar' to which it refers is the Cross, or rather the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, is certainly true, but the Eucharist of which we have the right to eat in the Church *is* the sacrifice of Christ. The Christian altar, the Lord's table, is on the same plane with Calvary. The Christian offering in the

[1] Even in the Old Testament 'altar' and 'table' are applied to the same thing. *Cf.* the remarkable words in Ezekiel xli. 22.

Eucharist *is* the one offering, even as it is said, 'This *is* My body,' 'This *is* My blood.'

This truth will again present itself when we consider the meaning of the 'greater and more perfect tabernacle' of ix. 11, and the exhortations to worship in x. 19–25. But it is of the first importance to grasp once for all that when the early Christians called the Eucharist 'the sacrifice,' they neither meant that it was a repetition of Calvary, nor that it was a bare commemoration, a mere sign of an absent thing, like the so-called sacrifices of the Law. The Eucharist belongs to the new era into which we with Christ have entered. It is part and parcel of the 'one offering for ever' which the eternal High Priest is pleading. Christ is performing by the Holy Spirit, through the words and actions of His ministers, identically the same act on earth which He Himself performs in heaven.

The liturgical language of the Catholic Church bears witness to this fundamental truth, though in different ways. The Eastern Church has expressed the unity of the offering on earth with that in heaven by praying after the words of consecration for the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the elements. The Western Church prays, on the other hand, that the elements after consecration may be taken up into the presence of God by the hand of the angel. Christ's offering is *one*, in heaven and on earth, on the Cross of Calvary, on the altars of the Church, in the heavenly courts.

This apostolic teaching concerning sacrifice must

have been full of consolation for those to whom it was originally addressed. Instead of looking upon themselves as cut off from all the ancient service of Israel, from the social and national commemorations, from the solemn joy of the Passover, from the Day of Atonement with its dramatic presentation of sin removed and renewed intercourse with God, they were taught to feel themselves in touch with the reality which underlay all the types. They were verily and indeed reconciled with God by the one offering, a sacrifice which needed no daily or yearly repetition, but was in continual activity.

And for Christians of all time, if the sympathies of our High Priest on the throne of God are a consolation that speaks to the heart, how unspeakably gracious is the thought of His one enduring and pervading sacrifice! Not merely do we look back to the historical moment of Calvary, we look upwards, we 'are come to the blood of sprinkling.' The infinite merits of the precious blood of Jesus are ours even now to appropriate. As a present fact, 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,' transforming repentance from an unavailing regret into that which is effectual and full of hope.

And the one sacrifice speaks to us of the value of our individual lives. 'Who loved me and gave Himself for me,' St. Paul is bold to say (Gal. ii. 20). We are not, then, mere specks in the universe, lost in the roll of countless worlds, our voices unheard amidst the harmonies of eternal and inexorable law. Each of us has been redeemed, and is even now being sanctified by that which is infinitely precious. Each

human life in union with that sacrifice has a worth which no earthly standard can measure. Nor is it merely forgiveness, nor merely the salvation of the soul from eternal loss, which is thus put in our possession by the sacrifice of Christ. We may even take up for ourselves with an individual meaning the words of the Psalm, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will O God!' We have the power of self-consecration. The will in the power of Christ's sacrifice may be exerted to its true end; human personality may assert itself to the utmost not only without sin, but in true harmony with the will of God. We are not merely pardoned criminals, nor as those who fear to do anything, because of themselves they can do nothing. It is ours to respond actively, strenuously, joyously to the call of God.

> Enough if something from our hands have power
> To live and act and serve the future hour;
> And if, as towards the silent tomb we go,
> Through love, through hope, through faith's transcendent dower,
> We feel that we are greater than we know.[1]

[1] Wordsworth, *The River Duddon*, xxxiv.

VII

THE TRUE TABERNACLE

'WE have such a high priest . . . a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man' (viii. 1, 2). These words, which follow immediately on the great description of the 'high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,' introduce us to one of the most difficult, but at the same time deepest and most remarkable, conceptions of the Epistle.

As we have already seen, the priesthood was the central feature, the basis and pivot (vii. 11) of the ordinances of the Law. But inseparable from the ministers of sacrifice and reconciliation was the Sanctuary,—the Tabernacle, and the later Temple. The writer therefore proceeds to unfold the meaning of this sanctuary in relation to the High Priesthood of Christ and His one Offering. He speaks throughout of the Tabernacle, rather than the Temple, for the former, in those Scriptures which have received the sanction of our Lord and His Church, stands as the original edifice, Divinely revealed in every detail, and only expanded, beautified, made more permanent by the work of Solomon, Zerubbabel, Herod.

It should be noticed, first of all, before any

approach to the writer's meaning can be made, that Tabernacle and Temple were not merely the *place* of sacrifice. The former is called 'the tabernacle [or 'tent'] of meeting.' 'The tabernacle of the congregation,' with which we are familiar in A.V., is a misleading phrase, as the very small proportions of the structure would have rendered it, in any case, useless for congregational worship. Rather, the Tabernacle was the *meeting-place of God and man.* 'Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them' (Ex. xxv. 8) is the first expression of the Divine purpose in its building. The pattern of the Tabernacle is revealed before any of the ritual of the sacrifices or the ordinances of the priesthood. It was to be a careful copy of a heavenly archetype, or ideal, which had been shown to Moses on the Mount (Ex. xxv. 40; Acts vii. 44); that is, the Tabernacle was the symbolical expression—we might almost call it the sacrament—of a purpose in the mind of God, which would in due time be revealed. Meanwhile the Tabernacle was the sign of God's presence, and it provided the Divinely sanctioned way of approach to God. Hence the later Jews imagined that the cloud of glory which filled both Tabernacle and Temple at their dedication permanently resided in the Holy of holies in Solomon's temple, and this they called 'Shekinah,' *i.e.* the 'Indwelling' or 'Resting' of God. Be that as it may, that the sanctuary was Israel's only approach to God's presence was shown in the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, which annually cleansed and reconsecrated the sanctuary as well as the nation: 'The priest . . . shall make atonement

for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar; and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly' (Lev. xvi. 32, 33).

Nothing in the religion of Israel could have been more impressive, more full of consolation, than the severe and stately beauty of the central sanctuary, bound up so solemnly with the Divinely guided history of the holy nation. It was the centre of national and religious unity, the visible symbol that God had chosen Israel out of all the nations of the earth to dwell with them. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in words whose very brevity and reserve suggest hidden depths of feeling, alludes to the ancient glories of the place, from which Christians were now excluded. 'For there was a tabernacle prepared, the first, wherein were the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the Holy place. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies; having a golden censer' (*marg.* altar of incense), 'and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; of which things we cannot now speak severally' (ix. 2–5).

Yet this sanctuary, with all its beauty and mystery, was essentially 'a sanctuary of this world' (ix. 1). It was made by the hands of man, it was but a transitory copy of a heavenly reality. It belonged to the same sphere as the sacrifices and all the external rites of the Law. Like them it was

only 'imposed until a time of reformation' (ix. 10). Moreover, its very secrecy and exclusiveness, the mystery of its veils and its darkness, bore witness to its limitations and imperfection. None but a priest could enter even 'the first tabernacle,' the Holy place; and into the inner shrine, 'the second tabernacle,' the Holy of holies, the high priest alone, once in the year, veiled in the smoke of incense, guarded by the sacrificial blood, helped by the fastings and prayers of watching Israel.

These ordinances, whatever their historical origin or development, are the word of the Holy Ghost (ix. 8). He signified by them that no real and living approach to God was yet possible for man. So long as 'the first tabernacle' even was standing—*i.e.* held its place as part of God's authoritative ordinance for man—so long did the outer veil shut out the laity of Israel from any share or sight of the sanctuary, 'the way into the Holy place hath not yet been made manifest.' For if 'the first tabernacle' was closed to view and entrance, much more was that presence of God to which it led, the Holy of holies, guarded by the second and inner veil.

And all this is 'a parable for the time now present' (ix. 9). On the understanding of this last phrase the whole meaning of the passage largely depends. 'The time now present' is equivalent to the common Jewish expression, 'this present age,' which was contrasted with 'the age to come,' the age of the Messiah. The writer therefore means that the imperfection of the tabernacle as an approach to God was a parable illustrative of the period before Christ

came, the period of types and shadows and outward ceremonies, out of which the Christian with Christ has already passed. 'At the end of the ages' Christ was manifested (ix. 26). And with Him begins the age of 'the good things to come.' The unconverted Jew or heathen still lives in 'this present time,' he has not died with Christ to the old world, nor entered into the new and heavenly world.

The Mosaic ordinances, however, even by their very limitations, pointed to enduring realities which Christians inherit. The Ascension of Christ into the heavens, as a prevailing High Priest for ever, was the antitype and reality which answered to the most characteristic office of the Jewish high priest, his entry into the Holy of holies on the Day of the Atonement, and his sprinkling the mercy-seat with blood. This is a truth which has become familiar to Christian thought. But the same can hardly be said of the companion truth, that Christ is exercising this eternal priesthood 'through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands' (ix. 11). What is *this* tabernacle? Our first and most natural thought, perhaps, is that the tabernacle means the heavens through which Christ passed at His Ascension, or 'Heaven itself,' where He now is; but this is quite inadequate to explain the passage. What, for example, could be the meaning of saying that 'the heavenly things' needed to be cleansed 'with better sacrifices'? (ix. 23). What purification could heaven require?

The Christian Fathers had the key to the true meaning, perhaps suggested to them by St. John ii. 21 ('He spake of the temple of His body'). They

uniformly tell us that this 'true,' or 'genuine,' tabernacle in which Christ ministers as a priest is His flesh, His body. It must be so, indeed. The old sanctuary which signified God's presence with man, which provided a ceremonial approach to God, could only find its fulfilment in the Incarnation, in that humanity of Christ by which God and man are for ever united. So Psalm lxxxv. 9 prophesied of 'glory dwelling [tabernacling] in our land,' and St. John describes the Incarnation as the 'tabernacling' of the Word 'among us' (i. 14).

And this true tabernacle, the temple of Christ's body, is 'not of this creation.' Christ's body was indeed material, tangible, visible; men's eyes saw and their hands handled the Word of Life. It was true human flesh and blood which the Word took 'of the substance of the Virgin Mary, His mother.' But the humanity of Christ was immaculately conceived, by a new creative act of God the Holy Ghost. It is indissolubly united to His Divinity, and it is glorified at the right hand of God. And it is by *this* tabernacle that we truly approach God, because He has by this drawn near to us. He is 'Immanuel, God with us.'

But this truth has a wider bearing, which is essential to the understanding of the writer's thought. Our Lord taught the true union of all believers with Himself. They eat of His Body and drink His Blood. He dwells in them, and they in Him. He is the Vine, and they the branches. That same new principle of Life which came into the world by the Incarnation quickens both the glorified human nature

of Christ, and the humanity of all those who are His, whether in earth or heaven. Hence the apostle speaks of the Church as being Christ's Body (Eph. i. 22, 23), and of every individual in the Church as 'a member' of Christ. Therefore if Christ's natural Body is 'the true tabernacle,' the Catholic Church, His 'mystical Body,' is equally so, being united to Him by sharing in His sacramental Body.

Thus the Catholic Church is the present reality of which Temple and Tabernacle were the imperfect type. The Church is partly in this world, some of its members have yet to pass through physical death, but it belongs throughout to a new and heavenly order. It is 'not of this creation.' Its members have died with Christ in Baptism; they are already in 'the age to come,' and are delivered from 'this present time.' Heaven has come down to earth. The new Jerusalem has descended 'out of heaven from God' (Rev. xxi. 2). The Church is the sphere of 'the heavenly things themselves' (ix. 23), where every individual, and every human tie of union, marriage, fatherhood, nationality, has been purified and made 'heavenly' by the Blood of Christ, by 'better sacrifices' than 'the blood of goats and calves,' which symbolically cleansed the 'copies of the things in the heavens.'

This interpretation seems to satisfy every expression which the holy writer uses. The believer is no longer excluded by a veil from the sanctuary (a truth which was visibly proclaimed by the rending of the Temple veil as Christ died on the Cross); he has already passed through the first veil, by 'a new and living way,' the way of the flesh of Christ (x. 19). Not

as yet, indeed, can he see the face of God, but Christ has entered for him into that unseen Presence. The second veil, which closed the Holy of holies, is not yet withdrawn. Its fair colours and woven cherubim (Ex. xxvi. 31) seem an apt image of the powers and beauties of Nature, the material barrier which still circumscribes the spirit's vision. But we know that beyond that veil is Christ. We ourselves are on the way to enter ; our Christian *hope* already has entered (vi. 19), and there like an anchor it binds the unseen and the seen.

Broadly speaking, then, the Holy place, no longer guarded by a veil, corresponds to the Church militant, and the Holy of holies to the Church triumphant. The spiritual significance of the rest of the furniture of the Tabernacle might easily be traced. Between the altar of burnt-sacrifice and the door stood the laver, where the priests must wash before entering (Ex. xxx. 17–21). This finds its counterpart in the 'laver of regeneration' (Titus iii. 5), the font whereby Christians enter into 'the true tabernacle.' Within the Holy place stood the table of shewbread, the continual memorial before God of the twelve tribes, which make up the mystical number of the Church. So, again, Christians are 'one bread, one body,' all have the priestly privilege of eating of the antitype of the shewbread, the Eucharist. And the Christian life within the Church is illuminated by the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are plainly typified by the seven lamps of the great candlestick.

The altar of incense which stood actually in the Holy place is apparently included by the writer

among the furniture of the Holy of holies (see ix. 4, margin R.V.). There is a natural fitness in this, for it was from that altar that the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, took the smoking incense which he was to offer unseen within the second veil. Thus the altar of incense suggests another most significant link between the visible and invisible Church. We on earth have a share in that cloud of worship and intercession which by the merits of the Incarnate knits earth and heaven in one (*cf.* Rev. viii. 3, 4).

Doubtless also those mysterious contents of the inner sanctuary, which rested from age to age, in darkness and silence, beneath the outstretched wings of 'the cherubim of glory,' were copies of heavenly realities, of gifts and powers which exist in the depths of the Godhead, and are ours in Christ; signs and sacraments they must have been of God's mercy and justice, of His creative and re-creative might. But the writer does not read us their lesson. He passes on to the more immediate truths of the meaning and duty of Christian worship, and the communion of saints.

Reserving these for future consideration, and confining ourselves here to 'the true tabernacle,' let us think what consolations this truth must have brought to those who were excommunicated by their kinsmen after the flesh, and thrust out from 'the sanctuary of this world'; and what consolations we may gather ourselves.

'The Hebrews' certainly, in spite of outward seeming and of any natural regret which they might

feel for the past, had exchanged the shadow for the substance. Debarred from the visible Temple courts, they had pierced the cloud and darkness of Sinai; with Moses they beheld the heavenly pattern, and were admitted within its pale. No longer had they to kneel without, content to know that the priest within was accomplishing his ministry; they had entered with Christ into the true Sanctuary. Though they could no longer see Him with the outward eye, yet the inward vision of faith could follow Him; and they knew that just as certainly as death follows life, and judgment death, so certainly would He reappear, 'apart from sin, unto salvation,' to the eternal blessing of those who waited for Him (ix. 27, 28).

But beyond these immediate consolations the apostolic teaching of 'the true tabernacle' introduces us to the great mystery of the Catholic Church. Belief in the Holy Catholic Church is an article of the Creed. For the Church is no mere human institution, nor historical development or survival; still less is it an abstraction which covers the different congregations or schools of those who profess to be Christians. The Church is indissolubly bound up with the Incarnation. The moment when our Lord first revealed it is most significant: it was the great crisis of the training of the Apostles, when St. Peter confessed the true office and the Divinity of Jesus. 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' (St. Matt. xvi. 16). The Church is the universal society of those who are in living union with the Head. Every baptised Christian who is a faithful communicant is an actual member of Christ's Body;

or, as it is elsewhere expressed, he is a living stone, forming part of the spiritual temple which rests on the foundation Rock of the Incarnate (1 Peter ii. 5).

The Church, though made up to our eyes of weak and fallible men, full of imperfections, and outwardly divided, is yet inwardly one, holy, and heavenly. She is not 'of this creation,' but belongs throughout to the heavenly order. Those who are within her 'taste the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come' (vi. 5). They are in possession of eternal life, they have passed within the veil; death for them is abolished. And though the Church passes from age to age of man's history, and bears outwardly the scars of many storms and changes, yet the Church knows essentially neither past nor future, but only the 'to-day' of eternity. So, also, the mind of the Church is the mind of Christ, so that her teaching, her view of the meaning of Holy Scripture, her attitude towards the problems of human life, is that hidden wisdom 'which God foreordained before the worlds' (1 Cor. ii. 7). And the touch of the Church's ordinances is the touch of Christ. They are not merely such types and symbols as the ancient Law provided, but veritably confer all that they signify.[1] The eternal High Priest not only intercedes for His people before the face of the Father, but actually takes them with Him, for they are within that Tabernacle where He dwells, His body. In the Sacraments the grace which His intercession wins

[1] Cf. the description of sacraments in Art. xxv. : 'Effectual signs of grace.'

flows through all His members, in forgiveness, healing, joy.

> What is this silent might
> Making our darkness light,
> New wine our waters, heavenly blood our wine?
> Christ, with His Mother dear
> And all His Saints, is here,
> And where they dwell is Heaven, and what they touch divine.[1]

We are yet far from realising the fulness of our heritage in the Catholic Church, the mystical Body of Christ, the sphere of the working of the Spirit of Christ. Our Baptism has brought us into 'the true Tabernacle,' a new world already bright with the glories of Heaven. We have even now the presence of God with us; we are on our way to the sight of God. Though as yet we cannot see the realities which lie beyond 'the second veil,' we are convinced of them, we feel their power, we strain towards them. And we have other effort than our own to help us. We are in communion with all holy souls and all high endeavour everywhere. The tide of hope and prayer sets towards eternity, and bears us with it. And sure as death and judgment is that which lies beyond them, the full realisation of the Church's hope, the perfection of humanity, the gathering together of all in Christ, the full indwelling of each in God and God in each. Then the Tabernacle will no longer appear in any sense external to ourselves, it will be omnipresent as the light, in us and we in it. 'And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof' (Rev. xxi. 22).

[1] Keble, *Lyra Innocentium.*, ix. 10.

VIII

THE BETTER COVENANT

A FURTHER aspect of the death of Christ, closely connected with His Priesthood and Sacrifice, is first mentioned in chap. vii. 22, and developed at intervals in viii. 6–13; ix. 15–20; x. 15–18. The Lord's death is the inauguration of a new and better covenant between God and man.

We read in Gen. ix. that the new era of the world which commenced after the Flood was marked by an 'everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' But the reference is not so much to this as to the more limited and special covenant made between God and Israel through Moses. This covenant had been foreshadowed and prepared for by a covenant made with Abraham (Gen. xv.) in the mysterious hour of 'deep sleep,' and 'an horror of great darkness,' when the land of Canaan was promised to the patriarch's children and its limits assigned. Four hundred years later the great lawgiver, withdrawn into the cloud and darkness of Sinai, received the 'tables of the covenant,' and 'the book of the covenant,' on the basis of which the national existence of Israel was to rest, and the renewed promise of the national

home, 'I will set thy border from the Red Sea unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness unto the River' (Ex. xxiii. 31).

The new-born nation solemnly consented to this, and their representatives saw the glory of the God of the covenant.

> Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
> Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
> Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
> Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
> Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work
> When they ate and drank and saw God also![1]

This covenant was the peculiar glory of Israel. It marked them out as separate from the nations of the earth, as the special objects of God's care. They were a 'kingdom of priests and an holy nation'; their inheritance was a 'good land,' 'the glory of all lands' (Ezek. xx. 15). Canaan, despised by the murmurers in the wilderness, became to the Jew of later time the dearest of all possessions, not only loved with patriotic and national feeling, but prized as the special gift of the God to whom all the earth belonged, as the very sign and pledge of God's favour. To be cast out from this inheritance was the worst and final doom with which the prophets threatened the impenitent; among the most pathetic lamentations of the Psalter are those which well up from the heart of the exile: 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Sion. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'

And yet with all this, as the writer of the Epistle

[1] Browning, *One Word more.*

points out, there were plain intimations in prophecy that a new and better covenant was in store in the counsels of God. The first covenant, like the priesthood and sacrifices and tabernacle, was not 'faultless.' 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah' (viii. 8—from Jeremiah xxxi.). It is into *this* covenant that Christians have entered through the death of Christ.

There can be little doubt that the key, in the mind of the writer, to the connection between the new covenant and the old, though he never directly mentions it, is to be found in the words which the Lord Himself had used at the Last Supper. He had said of the cup of blessing, 'This is My blood of the new covenant'—a plain allusion to the ritual of the covenant at Sinai, when Moses, sprinkling book and people with the sacrificial blood, had proclaimed, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words' (Ex. xxiv. 8; see Heb. ix. 18–21).

An initial difficulty meets us in the varying use of the words 'covenant' and 'testament' in our English Bibles, both words being used to translate one and the same word in Greek. The associations we attach to these two words are, of course, quite different. A 'covenant' usually means to us an agreement between two parties; a 'testament,' a disposition of some one person's property which will take effect after his death. What is there in common between these two, and why does the A.V. use sometimes one and sometimes the other? Even the R.V. has

not had courage to do away altogether with the latter word, which is derived from the oldest Latin versions and has become familiar to English ears. The revisers have, indeed, substituted 'covenant' for 'testament' in the accounts of the Last Supper and elsewhere, but they have retained it in the text of the passage Heb. ix. 16, 17, certainly obscuring the connection of thought to the ordinary reader.

The difficulty seems really to lie in this. The Greek word used by the New Testament writers for a covenant[1] is not the ordinary one[2] which was applied in common language to an agreement between man and man. The former word, which is adopted from the Septuagint, *is* the word for a will, or testamentary disposition. The explanation of its use in the sense of 'covenant' is important. A Divine covenant stands on a totally different plane from a human one. Man and God cannot meet on equal terms. There can be no bargaining nor any 'give and take.' Everything in the universe is the absolute property of God, man himself included. Consequently, a Divine covenant is not a mere agreement, it is a gift of God, a 'disposition' of His goods, which He makes of His own will and grace. He may attach conditions, as He did by giving the law, the 'book of the covenant,' to Moses; but these conditions constitute no legal claim on God. He may do what He will with His own. Even if man fulfilled, or thought he had fulfilled, every Divine condition, he would still be an 'unprofitable servant,' apart from God's free grace (St. Luke xvii. 10). Therefore in

[1] διαθήκη. [2] συνθήκη.

this sense a Divine covenant *is* like a 'testament.' Perhaps also the common use of the Greek word in the latter sense may have tended to suggest the allusions to death in ix. 16, 17, which at first sight to the English reader seem appropriate to the word 'testament.' The appropriateness, however, largely disappears on a closer view, and we have really no right, in spite of a chorus of commentators, to alter the rendering of the word in these verses, and substitute 'testament' for 'covenant.' Bishop Westcott suggests the following as a literal rendering of these two verses : 'For where there is a covenant, the death of him that made it must needs be presented. For a covenant is sure where there hath been death ; since it doth not ever have force when he that made it liveth.'

To understand these allusions to death in connection with a covenant we must not take refuge in the idea of a 'will,' but rather investigate the ancient ceremonial which accompanied the making of a covenant, whether human or Divine.

> Gather my saints together unto Me ;
> Those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice (Ps. l. 5).

Every covenant required a sacrifice to ratify it. The slain victims were apparently held to represent the makers of the covenant, who thus symbolically died, and thereby lost all power of altering their agreement. For that reason the writer of the Epistle says that in a covenant the death of the maker of it must be 'brought forward' or 'presented'; and the covenant is of force only 'upon the basis of dead victims'

(such is a more literal translation of the words 'where there has been death'). Perhaps, too, he is alluding to the ancient ritual of the covenanting parties walking between the severed portions of the sacrifice: ritual to which God mysteriously conformed Himself when the flaming torch (significant of the Divine Presence) passed between the pieces of Abraham's covenant-sacrifice (Gen. xv. 17).

A covenant was naturally completed by the contracting parties partaking together of the sacrificial banquet (*cf.* Gen. xxxi. 54). And thus, significantly, after the covenant of Sinai had been ratified by the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifices, we are told that Moses and the chosen elders ate and drank on the mountain, in the presence of God, being, as it were, His guests.

The death of Christ is the sacrifice by which the new covenant foretold in prophecy has been ratified, and His own words at the institution of the Eucharist are final on this point. He died as the representative of the human race: the dead body of the Lord showed the absolute self-surrender of man to the disposition of God. But Christ is Son of God as well as Son of man. It is really as Son of God that He is the Disposer and Maker of the covenant. And though God cannot die, yet by becoming man God has Himself passed through death. So in the fullest sense in this 'new covenant,' 'the death of him that made it,' both God and man, is 'presented.' Hence the new covenant is immutable, eternal, retrospective as regards the sins and failures of the old covenant, and carrying man, who submits himself

to it, from the old into the new, from the ancient promises to the better ones.

What are these 'better promises'? First of all, the new covenant carries with it not a temporal but 'the eternal inheritance' (ix. 15), not the land of Canaan, but man's true home and heritage, the 'better country, that is, a heavenly' (xi. 16), the fulfilment of human destiny in the resurrection-life. So in chap. xiii. 20, 'the God of peace' is spoken of as having brought again the Lord Jesus from the dead 'with the blood of the eternal covenant.' The allusion is to Zech. ix. 11, the promise of the restoration of the prisoners, of whom Joseph was a type when his brethren put him in the pit, the dead, those who had passed under the curse, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.' The Lord Jesus rising from the dead as the firstfruits of humanity has already entered upon man's 'eternal inheritance,' and the 'prisoners of hope' have been set free. But the resurrection-life begins even here. The better covenant has better promises for this present life. Instead of an external law of conduct, which, though 'holy, righteous, and good' in itself, was nevertheless 'unto death,' a burden, a terror, a conviction of sin, rather than a remedy—nay, even an incentive to further sin (Rom. vii.)—instead of all that, it is promised:

> I will put My laws into their mind.
> And on their heart also will I write them.

The law of God will be recognised by man, not as an outward restriction, but as the voice of his own true nature speaking within his breast. It will be

loved, and it will be kept, because it is a law of grace implanted by God Himself. For God and man are henceforth united :

> I will be to them a God,
> And they shall be to Me a people.

Man will not have to learn what God requires by being laboriously taught moral or ceremonial precepts dealing with each point of life. He will know it by knowing God. Love will reveal heart to heart. The least as well as the greatest will know, because love is deeper than intellectual knowledge. Not that Christians will know the truths of theology, or even the Christian law of conduct, without taking pains to learn and to be taught ; but the learning will be of a different order. Man will learn not as a slave to do what he is bidden, but as a son to do the works of love.

But besides this—and here we touch man's primal and most universal need—the new covenant will carry with it the forgiveness of sins :

> For I will be merciful to their iniquities,
> And their sins will I remember no more.

The burden of guilt and failure which the contrast between God's holy law and man's incapacity had left upon human conscience will be taken away. The law could only suggest the hope of forgiveness, it had no authority to declare man forgiven. For deliberate breaches of the Commandments no sin-offering could be made, no pardon on earth was possible, except by some special messenger from God, as Nathan was to David. 'The blood of goats and bulls' (*i.e.* the cere-

monies of the Day of Atonement), 'and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled' (*i.e.* by touching a dead body; see Num. xix.) might indeed 'sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh,' might remove in a suggestive manner some ceremonial pollution; but what of the real burden, that which really defiled, the 'dead works' (ix. 14)? A remarkable phrase, as if the works of man's natural state were some defiling corpse of the past which could never be got rid of. Under the new covenant, the very means by which this covenant was ratified, the blood of Christ, His surrendered life, which triumphed over death, is the living power which cleanses the conscience. Man is set free 'to serve the living God.'

The death sentence of the old covenant was written even in the very word of Jeremiah when he spoke of a 'new' one (viii. 13). And already the writer hints the visible execution of this sentence is at hand; the old 'is nigh unto vanishing away.' City and temple and all the outward pomp of priesthood and Levitical ceremonies, which at Jerusalem were still apparently in full possession—all are on the very eve of disappearance. The eagles already scent the carcass, the hum of the gathering armies of Rome is almost audible, the ploughshare already forged which Titus will draw across the once sacred foundations, where never again will the smoke of sacrifice rise, nor the mercy-seat be sprinkled.

And in the place of the old, the new is already established, eternal, not temporal, inward, touching man's soul and conscience—a covenant of grace and mercy, of Divine fellowship, of love.

This new covenant is the blessed condition into which every Christian entered at his baptism, and of which the Church's children are taught to say, 'I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.' Those who are called into the Catholic Church do not merely look forward to the fulfilment of a promise, like the saints of the old covenant. In a true sense they already have received their 'eternal inheritance.' That true, full human life, that perfect human good, which philosophers dreamed and despaired of, which materialists vainly endeavour to attain by the advancement of human knowledge or the improvement of man's material conditions, this is already within our grasp; for in union with God, His law written in our heart, 'the old things are passed away: behold, they are become new.' We begin our religion not by thinking what we must do for God, but by learning what God, by His own supreme disposition of grace, has already done for us.

The Christian heritage is as wide as the world and as broad as the life of man. Every country is the Christian's fatherland, as one of the earliest Christian writings declared.[1] 'Lay this body where you will,' said the dying St. Monica, 'nothing is far off in the eyes of God; nor need you fear that He will not know, at the end of this world, from what grave to raise me up. . . . One thing only I ask, remember me at the altar of God, wherever you are.'[2] And with a meaning greater than the speaker's mind it was said to the dying Hildebrand, when he complained, 'I have loved righteousness and hated

[1] *Epistle to Diognetus.* [2] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, ix.

iniquity, therefore I die in exile,' 'In exile canst thou never die, for as Vicar of Christ and His Apostles thou hast received the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.'

Nor is the kingdom of heaven too narrow for all that is good in human progress. 'All things are yours,' said the Apostle (1 Cor. iii. 21). All human learning finds harmony and unity under the rule of the master-science, Theology. Every art and every true development of the manifold nature of man may be consecrated in the Church, sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

> Christ said, 'I need them': out the colour sprang;
> The music wailed and triumphed down the aisles.
> With voices like the forest's poets sang,
> Invisible thoughts grew visible in smiles,
> In smiles and tears and songs, and the exact
> Majestic speech by centuries compact.[1]

Each generation of Christians will find its special 'consolation' in some aspect of the new and better covenant. Our own time is one of relaxation of discipline, of reaction also against a narrow and traditional Puritanism. 'I will put My laws on their heart.' Does not this suggest the true answer to what is a frequent danger, especially with the young, the danger of looking upon religion as if, after all, we still belonged to the old covenant—as if religion were in its essence a code of rules, a system of morals, a series of checks, restrictions, negations—as if it were the cramping and fettering of man, instead of his

[1] Archbishop Alexander, *Poems*, 'St. Augustine's Holiday.'

enfranchisement? Restrictions and discipline are really the helps and safeguards of freedom. The promises of our baptism are not legal conditions, but vows of love, binding flesh and spirit, intellect and will, to that loyalty which befits 'the adoption of sons.'

Again, is not that forgiveness which is a characteristic of the new covenant a very special need in a time of religious change and uncertainty, when so much is 'in the air,' and so little definitely touches the individual, when men tend to waste themselves in regrets and vague sentimentalisms? The burden of past sin and failure is often a very real one. It was a great message to the world when Divine forgiveness was definitely put within the reach of man, when the forgiveness of sins took its place as part of the Creed. But this forgiveness needs to be focussed upon the individual. How can he know that he is forgiven? It is not the method of the Epistle to the Hebrews to point out how the great principles of the Gospel are worked out in detail. But from the earliest days the Church recognised that the ministration of this forgiveness was vested in those whom God has authorised as 'ministers of a new covenant' (2 Cor. iii. 6). Baptism is the first and greatest ministry of forgiveness. This can never be repeated. Yet daily the Church reminds us that God 'hath given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.' And this definite and individual way to forgiveness is commended to us not only on our sick-bed, if conscience is 'troubled with

any weighty matter,' but whenever conscience is disquieted and 'comfort or counsel' is needed.[1] For He Who bade His Apostles proclaim 'remission of sins in His name unto all the nations,' said also to them, 'Whosesoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven' (St. John xx. 23).

[1] See The Order for the Visitation of the Sick and the first exhortation in the Holy Communion Service.

IX

WORSHIP

DOCTRINE and practice are so interwoven in the Epistle to the Hebrews that it is not possible to draw a dividing-line, as it is sometimes in St. Paul's Epistles (see Rom. xii. 1 ; Eph. iv. 25). Nevertheless, there is a very marked transition after x. 18. A new section here begins, of which the first three verses briefly summarise the great foundation truths which have been expounded in the central part of the Epistle—the Priesthood and the Sacrifice of Christ, and the Tabernacle of His Body.

The Christian excluded from the Temple worship and all the ancient consolations of Israel has deeper privileges unknown under the Law. He has entered into the true sanctuary, the heavenly reality, now established, for faith, upon earth, of which the Mosaic tabernacle was but a suggestion. He may with confidence enter the presence of God, not trusting merely in a duly performed ceremonial, nor cleansed outwardly with the blood of slain beasts, but 'by the blood of Jesus,' by the sacrificed but undying life of the Son of man. He has passed through the torn veil by 'a new and living way' ; 'new,' not merely because the feet of man have 'not passed this way

heretofore' (Josh. iii. 4), but 'new' (such is the sense of the original word[1]) as contrasted with that which is stale and outworn; 'new' because it is 'living,' and 'living' surely because it is the way of personal union with Him Who said, 'I am the Way.'

It is uncertain whether we are to understand 'His flesh' (x. 20) as in apposition with the 'new and living way,' or with 'the veil.' The writer may mean either 'the way of Christ's flesh' or 'the veil of Christ's flesh.' If the latter (as commonly understood), it is probably because the torn Temple veil is now no longer a barrier, but rather the way of entrance. But in either sense it is the human nature, 'the flesh' of Christ, which is our confidence and the pathway of our feet. And this 'new and living way' has been 'dedicated' or inaugurated for us not by any Moses or Solomon, but by Jesus Himself, for He, the Head of our race, was the first who travelled it, passing through life and death as man victoriously. And over the 'house of God,' to which the 'new and living way' gives access, He Himself reigns as King and Priest.

It is remarkable to notice what is the first practical duty which the writer at this point introduces by his 'therefore.' 'Let us draw near.' The word may suggest a contrast between the dark worship of ancient Israel outside the veil, and the priestly privilege of entering the Holy Place. It may also point back to the contrast between Moses at Sinai speaking face to face with God, and the people forbidden on pain of death to approach the mountain

[1] *πρόσφατος.*

and 'the thick darkness where God was' (Ex. xx. 21). But what is most to the point is this. To 'draw near' was one of the regular phrases in the Old Testament to denote the offering of sacrificial worship by the priesthood.[1] And the verses which follow (23–25) show quite clearly that what the writer means to inculcate is the united social approach to God of the Christian brotherhood in acts of worship. A similar exhortation is found in xiii. 15: 'Through Him, then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually.'

'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.' These words, which give the key to the passage, hint evidently at a practical peril, not indeed that Christian worship might be abandoned altogether, but that individual Christians might withdraw themselves from it. We can conjecture reasons for this danger. There would be fear of persecution, the obvious temptation to shrink from any public act which might emphasise the difference between Christians and their Jewish neighbours, increase the scorn and dislike under which 'the Hebrews' were smarting. Or, again, the disappointment to which we have already alluded, the sense of disparity between high hopes and ideals, and the poverty of actual Christian attainment, above all the contrast between the magnificence, the historic spell of the Temple worship and the meagre gatherings held in secret—now in this house and now in that—must all have tended to chill enthusiasm, perhaps to cause a falling-off in the zeal of common worship. Not yet

[1] See Lev. xxi. 21; Num. xvi. 5; Jer. xxx. 21.

had the Church been able to transfer the outward beauty of the ancient worship to her own service, to adopt from the Old Testament the lights, the incense, the processions, the song, which pilgrims in the fourth century admired in the services of the Christian Church at Jerusalem.[1] Art and music had not yet combined to set off visibly and audibly to men's eyes and ears the inward greatness and unearthliness of the central act of Catholic worship.[2] However, be the reasons for it what they may, the peril was evidently a real one; and it is surely significant that the first exhortation the writer bases on the teaching of chapters vii.–x. is to earnestness and perseverance in united worship.

Such worship has not only its theological groundwork but its personal conditions. It must be with *sincerity*: 'let us draw near with a true heart,' not as those who merely fulfilled an established order of ceremonial, but with the motive of approaching God Himself, heart speaking to heart. 'In fulness of faith': worship is only possible in a true sense when it is based on the personal acceptance of Christian *truth*. Without such a foundation it is unreal, mere sentimentalism or formalism. Each worshipper had been admitted to the 'new and living way' by a profession of faith. Turning to the east, he had recited one of

[1] See an interesting article in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, April 1904, on 'Holy Week at Jerusalem in the Fourth Century.' The writer points out the strong probability that these ritual observances were not derived by the Church from heathen religions (as is commonly supposed), but from the Divinely revealed worship of the old covenant.

[2] See the remarkable appreciation of the Eucharistic worship of the Church in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, cc. xxii.–iii.

those simple yet perfectly definite confessions of belief in the Three Persons in One Godhead, which formed the baptismal creeds of the early Church, and lead in unbroken continuity to the more developed but entirely identical creeds of to-day. In this faith he must continue. Again, worship must be entered upon with a *cleansed conscience*; the worshipper must be in that state of grace into which he entered in Baptism. The two remarkable phrases of x. 22, 'Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water,' seem to refer to the initial sacrament of the Church. The inward part of Baptism is the application of 'the blood of sprinkling' to the soul, cleansing it from the dead past, setting it free for the service of God; the outward part is the washing of water, the sacramental means of the inward. This state of grace, this new life, is a condition of true worship; the Christian starts from it as a foundation fact in his spiritual life (see vi. 1, 2). And Baptism can never be repeated; the apostate cannot in that way be 'renewed again unto repentance,' though confession of sin before the congregation might win the absolution which the Lord gave His ministers authority to grant (see 1 Cor. v. 3–5 and 2 Cor. ii. 10).

Such worship, such 'drawing near' in sincerity, faith, forgiveness, is closely connected with the needs and duties described in the two following verses. It will be a help against the danger which specially threatened 'the Hebrews,' that of wavering, turning aside, drifting away from the fundamental verities of their faith. It translates the baptismal profession of faith into 'the profession of hope,' for it brings the

worshipper nearer to the personal, living Author of faith: 'let us hold fast the confession of our hope, that it waver not, for He is faithful that promised' (x. 23).

Again, worship is a help to the common life; it quickens the mutual charity which is the compendium of all Christian duty: 'let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works.'

Once more, the conditions of the Church of 'the Hebrews' make united worship a duty of peculiar insistence and solemnity, 'so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.' The great crisis is at hand, of which the Epistle so often warns, the day of the testing of hearts, when all that is external will seem to be failing, and Christians will be thrown back for their sole refuge on the unseen truths they confess; the day of the dissolution of society, the break-up of the old world as they and their fathers have known it; the day of the gathering together of the eagles, of the setting-up of 'the abomination that maketh desolate,' when he who has forsaken Christ will have nothing to look forward to but 'a certain fearful expectation of judgment.'

Christian life has from the first been inseparable from the Christian faith and the Christian society. For Christianity is social life lived in a new relation to God and to one's fellow-men. It is a new life, founded on new truths, and issuing in a new social ideal. It is, moreover, a life whose common voice is worship, a worship which is essentially social, and which gains its meaning and power from the positive truths which it expresses. So the writer of the Acts

(possibly the same hand which wrote this Epistle) has sketched in one pregnant sentence the characteristics of the new-born Church, 'And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers' (ii. 42).

The distinctive act of Christian worship is 'the breaking of bread,' the Eucharist, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the great Sacrament of Christ's own institution, to which there are so many veiled allusions in this Epistle. In this service, where Christians really eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood of the new covenant, all the wonderful truths of Christ's sacrifice and His undying priesthood are, as it were, brought down to earth before the very eyes of men, are seen in actual exercise and progress. 'We *have* an altar' as a living, present fact.

> We need not now go up to Heaven
> To bring the long-sought Saviour down ;
> Thou art to all that seek Thee given,
> Thou dost e'en now Thy banquet crown :
> To every faithful soul appear,
> And show Thy Real Presence here.[1]

To this Sacrament the writer is doubtless alluding when he bids the Hebrews 'draw near.' His language has been thought even to suggest some of the features of the earliest liturgy of the Church, that apostolic fount from which all the Communion Services of the Catholic Church have been derived, and which alone can explain their remarkable resemblances—they are all one family and had one common origin. We may, perhaps, catch glimpses here,

[1] *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 556 (Charles Wesley).

and in the passage xii. 22–24, of some such service as St. Justin Martyr described about a century later. Though, as yet, there was no formal recitation of a creed, there was the reading of the law and the prophets and the writings of the Apostles, and the exhortation or sermon based on these ; there was the offertory and the kiss of charity, the commemoration of the living and the dead, the conscious communion 'with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven' ; there was the Eucharistic meeting with Jesus Christ Himself, and with the Eternal Father through Him. In any case, it is clear from one of the earliest extant Christian liturgies, one specially connected with the Church of Jerusalem, and bearing the name of St. James, what interpretation the early Church must have put upon the exhortation to 'draw near.' The 'Prayer of the Veil,' recited when the Eucharistic gifts about to be consecrated were unveiled to view before the faithful, is based upon the very words in question. 'We render thanks to Thee, O Lord, our God, for that Thou hast given us boldness to the entrance in of Thy holy places, the new and living way which Thou hast consecrated for us through the veil of the Flesh of Thy Christ. We therefore, to whom it hath been vouchsafed to enter into the place of the tabernacle of Thy glory, and to be within the veil, and to behold the Holy of holies, fall down before Thy goodness : Master, have mercy upon us : since we are full of fear and dread, when about to stand before Thy holy Altar, and to offer this fearful and unbloody sacrifice for our sins and the ignorances of the people. Send forth, O God,

Thy good grace, and hallow our souls and bodies and spirits : and change our disposition to piety, that in a pure conscience we may present unto Thee the sacrifice of praise.'

Our own Church takes up the apostolic injunction when she bids us, 'Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort.'

The decay of public worship is a sadly familiar fact at the present day. Luxury and materialism, the worship of wealth, comfort, excitement, are doing their work in blunting the natural sense of man's need of God, and his duty to Him. It is difficult to see how much of the modern attitude towards church-going can escape the condemnation passed upon him who 'hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing' (x. 29). But, besides the many who have forgotten God, there are certainly others who are thoughtfully, perhaps sadly, feeling after God, and yet shrink from the open profession of His Name, and from making full use of the services and sacraments of the Church. For such the Epistle to the Hebrews has a special message of 'exhortation' and 'consolation.'

Is not something at least of the modern abstention from church-going and Communion to be traced to a wrong idea of what public worship really is? Its essential purpose is not mere personal edification. Its value is independent of the officiant. Christians do not meet together to listen to sermons, still less to enjoy music, but rather to 'draw near' to God, to realise, to put into activity their common relationship

to God in Christ. Worship is the common effort to lift our life towards its ideal state, its true aim and end, to make progress on the 'new and living way' which leads to God, to associate ourselves more intimately with the 'great priest' who is 'over the house of God.' More especially the Eucharistic worship of the Catholic Church is the corporate realisation of those great and present truths, those 'powers of the world to come,' which the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of—the one, finished, yet abiding Sacrifice, the sympathy of the eternal High Priest on the Throne of God, the present possession of the eternal inheritance, the present joy of the new covenant, its personal access to God, its forgiveness, its brotherhood.

Private worship, private prayer, are indeed indispensable, yet they are not the highest exercises to which Christians are called. Rather they are the necessary foundation and preparation for the public service. That is why a fuller blessing is promised in the Gospel to the meeting together and the united prayer of Christians, than even to the prayer and fasting which are done in secret.

Public worship, then, whatever its failures, imperfections or trials, is certainly a duty of love which we owe one to another. It brings with it mutual encouragement, the sense of common effort. Rich and poor, learned and ignorant, meet in church, and only there as a rule, in the absolute equality of the new and better covenant (viii. 11). Worship may lead them to 'consider,' to fix the mind upon—it is the same word which is used in iii. 1 of the Christian's

attitude to Christ Himself—to 'consider one another.' And this is no small matter when the growth of democracy, paradox though it seems, is drawing 'classes' apart rather than together.

Moreover, public worship is a positive aid to faith. Especially is it a corrective to the perils of an age of criticism. Much that is new and startling in modern speculation and teaching with regard, for example, to the Holy Scriptures is not so much dangerous in itself to faith, but rather because it tends to produce a merely intellectual attitude towards religion. Saving faith is not of the intellect only, but of that which lies deeper. And this is just what men are being tempted to forget. After all, it is of far more vital importance that we should believe that the Holy Ghost 'spake by the prophets,' than that we should know how much or how little the historical prophets wrote. It concerns much more our eternal welfare that we should hear the Lord in His Resurrection glory pointing to Himself in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, than that we should busy ourselves in discussing dates and authorship, or the particular purpose of the writer when he first wrote down or spoke his message. Better it is that we should be strengthened in our hold of the Church's unerring witness to the verities of the faith, than puzzle ourselves over the supposed discrepancies or interpolations in the Gospels.

And it is in this regard that we shall find help towards holding fast 'the confession of our hope, that it waver not,' in the sanctities of Christian worship,

in the presence of Christ Himself in the Christian assembly, in the Christian Eucharist. Many to-day, like the Psalmist, bewildered with the problems of an unintelligible world, would find the resolution of doubts and fears 'in the sanctuary of God' (Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17).

'So much the more, as ye see the day approaching.' The warning given to the fainting Hebrew Church is not without its special significance to-day. The growth of materialistic conceptions and temper, the steady attack on the supernatural in religion, the fierce desire to make man's experience, learning, critical acumen, the measure of Divine truth—nay, the deliberate hatred of all that claims to speak with authority for God—such things may have been before in the history of the world, but scarcely in the past could they have found such opportunities or gained such possession as to-day. Side by side with the widest missionary efforts the world has seen grows the opposition to 'all that is called God, or that is worshipped' (2 Thess. ii. 4). Do we not see the twofold mystery of the Apocalypse being fulfilled? Along with the drying up of the great river barrier, 'that the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the sun-rising,' is there not also the going forth of the spirits of the trinity of evil 'unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God the Almighty' (Rev. xvi. 12–14)? And this is enough, surely, to make all who are on the Lord's side speak 'often one to another,' enough to bring home with fresh power to the

conscience of the Church the warning, 'not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, but exhorting one another.'

> By tempests, earthquakes, and by wars,
> By rushing waves and falling stars;
> By every sign the Lord foretold,
> She sees the world is waxing old;
> And through that last and direst storm
> Descries by faith her Saviour's form.[1]

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[1] Keble, *Christian Year*, Second Sunday in Advent.

X

H. Tr. 16. 24.

THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

'BUT we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul' (x. 39). This verse in its revised form shows plainly the connection between the great Faith-chapter and what has gone before. The imminent danger of 'the Hebrews' was apostasy, not perhaps a deliberate denial of Christ, but something practically identical, a 'shrinking back,' a 'drifting away,' from the Christian faith and hope. And this, the surrender of a treasure once possessed, the writer of the Epistle, in words uncomfortably like the most debated clauses in the Athanasian Creed, is not afraid to say means 'perdition,' ruin, the loss of the soul. Evidently to him there are but two alternatives, two folds, in one or the other of which all must ultimately find their place—the lost and the saved. What is the distinguishing standard or mark? It is Faith.

Chapter xi., one of the most vivid and beautiful in the whole of Scripture, eloquently works out this great thought, clothing in flesh and blood the profound theological conception of St. Paul and St. John, making to pass before the reader's eye the inner

history of the world as it is read by the mind of the Spirit.

The writer begins, not with a formal definition of Faith, but by stating, first, its existence as a fact, and then certain characteristics of it which bear directly upon the present perils of 'the Hebrews.' 'Now faith *is*,' such is the shade of meaning implied in the order of the Greek words,[1] and it is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.' 'Things hoped for' are, by definition, things not yet realised, possibly, from the human point of view, not yet in existence even; at any rate, things beyond our present horizon. Yet all the things hoped for by Christians are hoped for because God has promised them, and therefore they have already a real existence in the mind of God, *e.g.* the resurrection of the body, which must be a fact as real and present *now* to God as the crumbling dust of the dead in all the graves of the world. And Faith is that God-given faculty in us which grasps such far-off things as existing realities, gives us 'assurance' of them, makes them real to us in our measure as they are real to Him. An illustration in a lower sphere may be found in that natural faith by which on the evidence of the senses we grasp as a fact and make our own the existence of the material world. Divine faith, of which the writer is speaking, moves on a higher plane; it is supernatural, its objects are ultimate verities as God knows them, wills them, and will in His own time bring them to pass. Faith makes such things, which are eternally real in themselves, real to us.

[1] ἔστιν δὲ πίστις κτλ.

Again, Faith is 'the proving of things not seen.' Just as with regard to visible things—events which have happened or do happen on the stage of this present world—there are known means of testing and proving, and so of gaining practical certainty, historical 'provings,' mathematical 'provings,' scientific 'provings,' so Faith is the proof of the Divine truths which transcend our experience or our reason. At the most they can never be more than probabilities to man's natural faculties; it is Faith which transforms them into certainties. So, for example, various lines of probable reasoning converge to the existence of God, but in the last resort it is Faith only which can so prove to the individual that God *is* that he will act on that certainty, just as in the natural sphere he will refrain from touching fire, being satisfied with the proof that it burns, or from trying to walk on the water, having proof that it will not bear him.

The writings of the Old Testament contain the age-long 'witness' of the Holy Spirit to the existence and the power of this mystery of Faith. Faith is a necessary postulate of the very first statement of the Bible, that 'God created.' 'By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God' (xi. 3). The invisible beginning of the visible universe, the original appearance of what is material from what is spiritual, the creation of the world not out of pre-existing matter, but by the sole will of Almighty God—this involves a leap which no reasoning of man, no human logic, can rightly make: science can give no account of it, no experiment can

illustrate it, no proof be given. We may say, 'it *must* have been so,' and yet before we can have 'assurance' that God created heaven and earth a new faculty must be brought into play, the spiritual and supernatural power of Faith. And, again, Faith is the necessary condition of the highest exercise of human nature, the coming to God, religion; 'he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him' (xi. 6). Faith must supply the 'assurance' both of God's personal existence and of His moral nature. Without these postulates religion is meaningless. And yet, neither nature nor any unaided human faculty can give them. Again we are thrown back upon Faith.

Scripture bears witness not only to the necessity of Faith, but to its actual existence among men from the beginning. The writer proceeds to set before us in phrases unmatched for brevity and suggestiveness a succession of great examples, extending from the very dawn of history to the national struggles of the age immediately preceding the times of Christ. Three such types are given from the patriarchal age: Abel, whose 'more excellent' (literally 'fuller') sacrifice proved that he had realised more than his brother the claim of God upon all that man possesses or wins; Enoch, whose aims and ideals were not those of the men among whom he lived, who 'walked with God,' and was not absorbed, as his contemporaries no doubt were, in the hunting and the fighting and the struggle for food of primitive society; Noah, who believed God's warning, and gave up time and energy

to preparing what seemed to his own generation the mere folly of a dreamer.

With Abraham began a new era of faith. His faith was not merely that of an individual: he set, as it were, the tone for all his true descendants. He was the father of the faithful, of the Church. 'I have known him,' pronounced the Divine election, 'to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord' (Gen. xviii. 19). The first thing recorded of Abraham is a great venture of faith. Not from any spirit of wandering, nor influenced by any human hope of conquest or gain, but trusting in the Divine call, he made a break with all the associations and traditions of his past, forsaking apparently the present and tangible good for the visionary and remote; 'he went out, not knowing whither he went.' The faith of separation passed on into what was harder still, the faith of patient waiting, and yet a faith so active that it had power to influence an aged and somewhat sceptical wife, an unimaginative son, a self-seeking grandson, so that they not only lived in faith, but 'died according to faith,' 'having seen' the promises 'and greeted them from afar,' stretching out as it were hands of longing, like the spirits in Virgil as they gather to the river-brink—

In utter love of that far-lying shore.[1]

The holy writer sees in Abraham's faith something of a higher order than nature. It was not merely an earthly possession for his descendants that he looked

[1] Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore. *Aen.* vi. 314.

forward to, but something permanent, unchanging, Divine—the true life of man in union with God, which only God could bestow. 'He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God' (xi. 10); his descendants desired 'a better country, that is, a heavenly.' They held the unseen of more value than the seen; and their faith was to them the assurance of a truly existing reality. God 'hath prepared for them a city' (xi. 16).

That such was the true character of Abraham's faith is seen clearly in the crowning action of his life —his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. He who 'had gladly received the promises' was ready at God's word to surrender them. He had not learned in vain the secret of the miraculous birth of Isaac. He soared above even what had been revealed, and grasped the truth of truths—that man's life, taken into union with God, is eternal. God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead; and although the father was not suffered to consummate the sacrifice, yet the preservation of his son was of the nature of a resurrection. It was at least a 'figure,' a 'parable' of a reality hereafter to be revealed (xi. 19).

So, again, the faith of Isaac and Jacob transcended human customs and probabilities. They set the younger before the elder in their parting blessings. The will to believe in God gave them glimpses above nature of the future purposes of God. 'By faith' the blessing was given, 'concerning things to come' (xi. 20, 21). The next section (xi. 22–31) deals with the great events of the Exodus, which welded the family of Abraham into a nation. Joseph bequeathed

his bones to the soil of the land of promise—a silent witness through the years. Moses gave up all that Egypt could offer — a princely estate, intellectual pleasures of the highest order, the wealth and the fascination of the oldest civilisation of the world, to be a wanderer, overburdened and misjudged by the thankless multitude in the wilderness. But what he suffered was no strange or isolated thing; it was 'the reproach of Christ' (xi. 26), for the Passion of Christ, though revealed once in history, yet lasts through all the ages of man. Faith must suffer; he 'that is born after the flesh,' he that looks for his good things in this life, must persecute him 'that is born after the Spirit' (Gal. iv. 29). Especially must the man whose ideal is self-sacrifice for his brethren be prepared not for their gratitude, but their reproaches. Moses, like Abraham, looked for a recompense of a different order from this world's rewards. Even in this world he saw 'Him Who is invisible,' and in the power of that celestial vision he braved the wrath of Pharaoh and the unbelief of his own people, the dread approach of the Destroyer, and the encircling terrors of the Red Sea passage.

The faith of Moses was inherited by his successor. Joshua, by faith in the unseen 'Captain of the Lord's host,' won the miracle of the fall of the walls of Jericho. Nor was this faith the exclusive privilege of the chosen nation. Even among 'the disobedient,' those who could not read the signs of their time nor see the hand of God in the advance of Israel, stands out the faith of Rahab, who grasped the true meaning of events. 'The Lord your God,' she confessed

to the spies, 'He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath' (Josh. ii. 11). Lastly, in a passage of unrivalled eloquence (xi. 32–38), the writer sums up the triumphs of a thousand years of faith, from the days of the Judges to those of the Maccabees. It was faith, and not the largest and best-equipped armies, that 'subdued kingdoms,' as Gideon, and Barak, and David had done; faith, with whatever human imperfections, that established the kingdom of Israel upon 'righteousness' rather than on force; faith that won the fulfilment of promises, like the faith of Hezekiah and Isaiah, hemmed in by the hosts of Sennacherib. Faith again vindicated the religion of Daniel and his companions, whether in the fiery furnace or the lions' den; faith preserved the sacred nation through all its vicissitudes, ending in the desperate attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to extirpate Judaism by every sort of insult and torture.

The sufferings of the faithful Jews under this profane Syro-Greek tyrant suggest, in verse 35 (one of the most marked allusions to the Apocrypha in the New Testament), a consolation of a higher order. Faith triumphs by suffering; its truest victories appear often to the world as reverses and defeats. Not only by miracles was faith vindicated, but by the absence of miracles, by human endurance to the bitter end of all that malice could inflict. Greater than the blessedness of the Zidonian widow or the Shunammite, who received their dead sons restored to life by Elijah and Elisha, was that of the Jewish mother (2 Macc. vii.), who unwaveringly beheld her seven sons put to death with hideous tortures before her very eyes rather than

deny the God of their fathers, and encouraged them to persevere 'that they might obtain a better resurrection.' 'The King of the world shall raise up us, who have died for His laws, unto an eternal renewal of life. . . . But above all was the mother marvellous and worthy of honourable memory, for when she looked on seven sons perishing within the space of one day, she bare the sight with a good courage for the hopes that she had set on the Lord' (vii. 9, 20).

In the same goodly company the writer includes all the martyrs and confessors of old time who had no deliverance, yet counted the happiness of this world well lost for the sake of God, 'of whom the world was not worthy.'

The faith of this long array of chosen spirits not only stands as an example to the fainting 'Hebrews,' but even waits for them, requiring a like or better faith from them, inasmuch as they know a fuller truth. This is a condition of the attainment of the great consummation of the Church, 'apart from us they should not be made perfect.'

But this closing verse of the chapter leads on to the description of the Communion of Saints in chapter xii. It will be sufficient here for us to fix our attention on this Faith, which has been so glowingly portrayed, to note its essential characteristics, to read its 'consolation' for ourselves.

The man of faith is pre-eminently he who trusts in the word of an unseen God, rather than in any of the tangible considerations which influence ordinary human thought and action. He is ready to put aside

the visible, the pleasant, the useful, the reasonable, all that this world values and strives for, that he may aim at the hidden good, the spiritual reward. He has heard a voice speaking to him out of a higher world than this, and wills to follow it. And the man who has thus held so lightly the world's estimate, whose gaze is fixed on what is above the world, can trample the world under his feet. He possesses all things, though he is 'destitute, afflicted, evil-entreated.' When the banners and bugles of this world have passed, he is found the world's true master.

This is a lesson peculiarly needed in a materialistic age. The increase of material comfort, combined with the passing away of many ancient barriers and restrictions, both bad and good, is tending to set men's affections very much on this world. It seems to-day as if possible pleasure relinquished were so much positive loss, an absolute injustice to oneself. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' whether the eating and drinking be physical or intellectual, tends always to be the maxim of a self-indulgent society. And in face of this we need the sharp, clear lesson that true self-realisation, the seeking after a country of one's own (xi. 14), involves self-sacrifice. It is easy to accuse such a view of life of 'other-worldliness,' but such an accusation would only be just if the other world were conceived as on the same plane as this. The spiritual world which the man of faith prefers is not primarily viewed as a place of 'rewards,' but of truth and righteousness, objects which alone can satisfy our nature; and the instinct which urges faith

to lay hold of them is the deepest and divinest in the soul of man.

> We needs must *love* the highest when we see it.[1]

Faith of this sort is the key to intellectual as well as to moral problems. Human nature is *one*, and it is one and the same fundamental error which makes one man aim at a luxurious, self-indulgent ideal, governed only by the average opinion of his society or his 'set,' and another reject the revealed truths of God's Word, because the ordinary probabilities of life seem to contradict them. The man who disregards the moral law, and the man who rejects the Catholic Faith wholly or in part, are each alike preferring the seen to the unseen; each is turning back to that country which the Christian in his Baptism has left, though it lies always close beside him, and the 'opportunity to return' is ever at hand. The Athanasian Creed is true to human nature when it warns of one and the same penalty for him who has failed to keep the Faith 'whole and undefiled,' and him who has 'done evil.' For it is the same spirit which ultimately decides the acceptance or rejection of both the Christian rule of *life* and the Christian rule of *belief*.

The remedies against failure of faith which the writer states in xii. 1–2 are very significant; they are moral remedies. First come self-discipline and penitence; 'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,' . . . 'run with patience the race that is set before us.' And then follows the

[1] Tennyson, *Guinevere*.

personal devotion to the Saviour which alone can transform discipline into the service of love and joy: 'looking unto Jesus.' He, the Son of man, is 'the author and perfecter' of man's faith. He first trod to the end the royal road. He has in Himself gathered together and made perfect and efficacious all the efforts and all the sufferings of Faith, and shown us its essential triumph. In Him we not only see what man's faith is and must be, but by obeying Him we have power to attain and keep it. No one, we believe, who from his heart has set himself to obey the Lord Jesus, in every part of his life, can ever deny the Catholic Faith, as far as he knows it, nor ever make moral shipwreck. This obedience will mark the ultimate severance between Faith and unbelief, between those to whom it was said, 'Ye believe not because ye are not of My sheep,' and those others who possess the promise, 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand' (St. John x. 26–28).

XI

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

THE eloquent chapter (xi.) which describes the nature and necessity of faith, its age-long existence and continuity and triumph, ends with remarkable and suggestive words. The ancient heroes of faith did not receive the fulfilment of the promises for which they looked, 'God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect' (xi. 40).

We are thus introduced to the great mystery of the Communion of Saints, the fellowship, the common interests and sympathy of all holy souls, living and departed. The writer's words clearly imply, first, that those who 'died in faith' have a continued existence, they are not dead, but living; and, secondly, that their final perfection is in some way conditioned by the efforts of the Christian Church on earth. The statement that 'apart from us' they are not to be made perfect does not seem satisfied by merely referring it to our Lord's descent into hell and to His preaching there to the dead (1 Peter iii. 19, 20). Rather, it seems a legitimate deduction that not only had the fathers of the old covenant to wait in God's safe keeping for the better revelation made in

Christ, but that the blessedness of the whole family of God waits for the effort of each generation and each individual for its completion. 'Consider,' says St. Chrysostom, 'how great a thing it is that Abraham and the Apostle Paul should sit and wait until thou art made perfect, that they may be able then to receive their reward. If we are all one body, this body has the greater delight when it is crowned as a whole, rather than in part. For it is one of the wonders of the saints that they rejoice in the good things of their brethren, as if these were their own.'

The opening words of chapter xii. proceed to show that this truth has no mere speculative interest, but has a direct bearing upon this present life. It is urged as a motive for our own endeavour, a motive which in no way detracts from the supreme attraction of 'Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith,' that 'we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.' The arena of the Christian struggle is grander and vaster than it seems. Not in the narrow streets of earthly Jerusalem, amid the scornful and averted looks of Scribe and zealot, was the conflict of the faith being waged by the fainting 'Hebrews,' but in the august presence of the mighty dead. The word 'witnesses,' indeed, as it has often been pointed out, does not literally mean 'spectators,' but simply those who have borne 'witness' to truth by their lives or deaths.[1] Nevertheless, the allusion to the onlookers in a theatre is too clear to be missed or explained away. The thought in the writer's mind is certainly

[1] μάρτυς, one who bears witness.

that of the rising tiers of spectators in one of the great Roman or Greek amphitheatres. The runner or combatant, though his eyes are fixed on the goal, and every muscle is strained in the supreme endeavour, is yet conscious of the 'cloud' on every side of him, the spectacle, dim and blurred, but intensely real, of the crowded myriads of onlookers who are watching him with eager gaze as he rushes past. He feels their breathless suspense, he hears their shouts of rivalry or approval.

The whole passage would lose its vividness if it did not imply that the saints in Paradise, whether conscious or not of the actual details of what is going on upon earth, are spectators of the Church's conflict, and feel themselves intimately concerned with it. The same truth is mysteriously shadowed forth in the vision of the Apocalypse, where the waiting souls of the martyrs beneath the heavenly altar are crying out to God for the ending of the moral puzzles of the world they have left, and the vindication of the Divine justice: 'How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost Thou not judge?' (Rev. vi. 10).

The Epistle to the Hebrews delights in contrasts, and the contrast which is here subtly suggested between the appearances and the reality of the Christian warfare is followed (in xii. 18–24) by a carefully drawn-out contrast between the most remarkable scene in the history of the old covenant, the moment of the law-giving on Sinai, and the abiding verities which encircle the life of the Christian. It is a magnificent passage, and one which might well serve as a commentary on St. Paul's

words in 2 Cor. iii. 9: 'For if the ministration of condemnation is glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.' The Divine origin of the older legislation was visibly and terribly set forth before men's eyes. The 'signs from heaven' which the Jews vainly asked for from Christ and His Church were clearly given at Sinai. There was a fire, which was 'palpable and enkindled,' there was 'darkness and blackness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words'—a voice which did not attract, but terrified, so that even Moses himself (as Jewish tradition told) confessed his own fear and trembling. Nothing of this sort, no terrors, natural or supernatural, accompany the normal operations of the Holy Ghost in the Christian Church. But there is something greater and more gracious. The people at Horeb could but shrink away and beg that they might hear the voice from heaven no more. 'Ye are come unto,' ye are in communion, in living touch with (the word is the same as the 'draw near' of Christian worship in x. 22),[1] the most certain verities of the spiritual world, those high existences which faith assures of and proves. 'Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' Every phrase has its value. 'Zion' is the 'fortress,' the strong and eternal foundation of that spiritual building whose complete manifestation will be the final answer to earth's most obstinate problem, the existence and malice of evil. 'The city of the living God,'—that commonwealth which will for ever justify God in creating man as a

[1] See above, p. 106.

social being, a being who needs for his perfection both the companionship of other created beings like him and the fellowship of his Creator. 'The heavenly Jerusalem,'—the home of perfect joy and peace, the peace which is not mere absence of conflict, but the eternal harmony of work and rest.

To this ideal state of man, for which the prophets and the men of faith had looked, and of which they saw faintly a type even in earthly Jerusalem, 'beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth' (Ps. xlviii. 2), towards which again the noblest spirits of the ancient heathen world aspired, and of which Plato had said that, though unrealisable on earth, it was at least a pattern laid up in heaven, which those who desired might behold, and, beholding it, order their lives aright[1] —to this Christians have already come. Outwardly in a state of poverty, suffering, reproach, they are truly in heaven already; their feet, bleeding with the hard ways of this world, even now are treading 'the free and spacious streets of that Jerusalem which is above.'

Not only have we come to the place, but to those who dwell there, 'to innumerable hosts of angels,' or as it might be rendered, 'to innumerable hosts of angels in joyous assembly.'[2] The angels, those elder sons of God, whose existence is assumed at every stage of revelation, are now no longer the awful ministers of God's fiery holiness and wrath, nor the bearers of isolated messages, fragments of Divine teaching, as in the Old Testament. They are rather conceived of as

[1] Plato, *Republic*, ix. 592.

[2] *πανηγύρει*; the word is used of the great national assemblies of the Greeks, as at the Olympian games.

the associates and patrons of human life and human joy. 'Ye are come to the Church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven.' This expression seems to include all the faithful, whether they are still living on earth or not. All are 'first-born,' for all are sharers of the highest privileges that the common Father can give. Not as on earth, where only one can win the prize in the race, only one inherit the full blessing—here all attain and all are kings and priests. And they are 'enrolled in heaven,' in that 'Book of Life' which is so often and significantly alluded to in Scripture. It is the roll of the citizens of Zion, whose qualification is holiness (Isa. iv. 3).

This Book of God, where the standard of enrolment is of a higher order than that which passes current on earth, seems to suggest the next phrase, 'to God the Judge of all'—that is, to the supreme and perfect moral Authority, of which earthly justice at its highest is but a shadow, and often a mere caricature, and to which human conscience makes its great appeal.

This thought in its turn leads on to the next, 'to the spirits of just men made perfect.' These are definitely the dead, the spirits of those faithful ones who wait for the general resurrection and the reunion of soul and body. In what sense they are said to be 'made perfect' is difficult to decide. Their perfection may be spoken of ideally, as already complete in the mind of God, Who has delivered them from an imperfect world and the possibility of failure; or it may mean that they have been already purified actually from every earthly stain, are even now in the

presence of God with Christ, and enjoy the Beatific Vision, as far as a disembodied spirit may. These are matters of speculation, but the important points in the view of the writer evidently are that those spirits are not unconscious and sleeping, but are living citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem (*cf.* Rev. xx. 4), and that we on earth are already 'come to' them.

How this is possible is told in the concluding phrases. We are come to the angels and the saints because we are come to 'Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant,' and to that 'blood of sprinkling' by which the covenant is ratified. By a startling metaphor this blood of Jesus is described as 'speaking.' But it is not a voice crying for retribution, like that of the martyrs of the old covenant (though that was a just appeal and will be answered), but for the mercy which is man's deepest need.

> Abel's blood for vengeance
> Pleaded to the skies;
> But the blood of Jesus
> For our pardon cries.[1]

The teaching of the two passages which we have been considering supplies one of the most suggestive 'consolations' of the Epistle, in answer to the apparent loneliness and isolation of Christian effort. Though we may seem to be in a minority, standing apart from, or vainly battling against, the whole stream of the world's tendencies, 'they that be with us,' as we should see if our eyes were opened, 'are more than they that be with them' (2 Kings vi. 16). Every effort to do and to suffer for Christ affects a wider

[1] *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 107 (Faber).

area than we know. Other eyes than our neighbours' are looking on; other hearts beat in sympathy. For in Baptism we have passed into a world where earth and heaven meet.

This glorious truth of the co-operation of angels and holy souls with our earthly efforts is one that needs re-assertion. It is true, indeed, that vital religion can only begin with the personal relation between the individual soul and its Maker, but it does not stop there. Union with God in Christ brings with it other consequences and blessings which Puritanism ignored, and so was untrue both to human nature and to revelation. Possessing Christ, we possess the love and fellowship of all who are His. Failure to recognise this is at least partly to blame for the miserable superstitions which pass under the name of 'Spiritualism.' There is truly a world of spirits in which the Christian lives and moves, and with which he has true relations. No truth, for example, is more clearly stated in the Bible than the existence, the nearness, the present help, of the holy angels, yet how small a part it plays in the usual English conception of religion! Here is a legitimate exercise of the faculty of *imagination*, when it is converted, consecrated, brought under the obedience of faith, as every faculty which is truly human ought to be.

Again, Scripture plainly teaches that whatever 'great gulf' is 'fixed' between different spiritual regions, is fixed between the lost and the saved rather than between the dead and the living. It is, indeed, as a whole, unrevealed what is the present condition of those whom we have known and loved

in Christ on earth, or of those whose examples we revere in the history of the Church. It is unrevealed what their present knowledge of earthly things may be, or their influence upon them. We chafe at the bars of our ignorance, we are ready to cry out in our bereavement :

> Ah, Christ, that it were possible
> For one short hour to see
> The souls we loved, that they might tell us
> What and where they be.[1]

Yet there are truths bearing on this problem which certainly form part of the heritage of the Church and ought not to be ignored. They may, indeed, have been exaggerated in one age, as well as obscured in another. They may appeal in different ways to different ages and orders of mind. But neither changes nor misunderstandings ought to rob us of their consolations.

First of all, the dead are not, any more than the living, beyond the reach of prayer. Indirectly, of course, they are concerned with all the Church's effort, whether of work or prayer, for all that effort tends to one end, the coming of Christ's kingdom, which the dead now know and see more clearly than on earth to be the one true object of desire. But the dead come directly, also, within the scope of the Church's intercession. It has already been noted in an earlier chapter how the first fragmentary utterances of Christian hope over the graves of the dead bear witness to this.[2] Christianity is essentially *human*,

[1] Tennyson, *Maud*, Part II. iv.

[2] *Cf.* St. Paul's prayer for Onesiphorus (2 Tim. i. 18). A comparison with verse 16 suggests that Onesiphorus was dead.

and prayer for the departed is the voice of sanctified human affection, which has learned that the grave is not the end of things. And not only did Christians from the first use privately such petitions as those which ask for increasing light and comfort and peace for the holy dead; the Church definitely included the departed in the great Eucharistic intercession. 'Then we make mention too,' says St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 'of those who have fallen asleep, first of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, that God would at their prayers and intercessions receive our supplication; then, too, on behalf of our holy fathers and bishops, and briefly of all amongst us who are fallen asleep before us, believing that it will be the greatest benefit to the souls on behalf of whom supplication is offered, while the holy and most awful Sacrifice is lying before us'[1]

And our own branch of the Catholic Church, escaping from the fetters in which an inhuman Puritanism tried to bind her, not only added, in 1662, with perhaps more love than logic, the concluding clause of the Prayer for the Church Militant, but she never relinquished that widest of all intercessions in the Prayer of Oblation, praying that 'we and *all Thy whole Church* may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion.'

And another truth handed down in the Church, which seems plainly to follow from the fact that we Christians are come already to the spirits of the just, is that the prayers of these holy dead avail for us, the

[1] St. Cyril, *Lectures on the Mysteries*, v. 9.

living. Indeed, a very large part of the Catholic Church, both in East and West, has believed for many ages that it is lawful to address both angels and saints, and to ask for their prayers. A practice so ancient and widely spread is, of course, not to be lightly condemned, whether we feel able to adopt it for ourselves or not. What has been a consolation to so many, and can hardly be called inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture, merits at least a respectful suspense of judgment. In any case, considering what is revealed to us of the nearness of the 'innumerable host of angels,' and the 'spirits of just men made perfect,' it seems fitting that we should recognise that nearness, that we should thank God for it, and pray for the continuance of the help of angels and saints, even as we pray for our daily bread and the daily help of God's grace.

English Churchmen owe, perhaps, more than they realise to John Keble for his reverent re-assertion of these truths in due proportion to other parts of the faith. In his prelude to the 'Lyra Innocentium' he speaks of those

> Who love upon their knees
> To linger when their prayers are said,
> And lengthen out their Litanies
> In duteous care for quick and dead.

In the Poem for St. Barnabas' Day he has beautifully expressed the consolations of the Communion of Saints:

> O happy spirits, mark'd by God and man
> Their messages of love to bear,
> What though long since in Heaven your brows began
> The genial amarant wreath to wear,

And in th' eternal leisure of calm love
Ye banquet there above,
Yet in your sympathetic heart
We and our earthly griefs may ask and hope a part.

And in a poem little known, but of unrivalled beauty and spirituality, he has touched again a note which has never ceased to sound in the Church's inward ear, since the Third Word was spoken from the Cross:

Therefore as kneeling day by day
We to our Father duteous pray,
So unforbidden may we speak
An Ave to Christ's Mother meek:
(As children with 'good morrow' come
To elders in some happy home),
Inviting so the saintly host above
With our unworthiness to pray in love.[1]

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[1] 'Mother out of Sight,' a poem written originally by Keble for the *Lyra Innocentium*, but withdrawn by him in deference to the opinion of others, though much against his personal wishes. It may be found in Palgrave's *Treasury of Sacred Song*, p. 263.

XII

THE PRESENT KINGDOM

WHEREFORE, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace [*or* thankfulness], whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe' (xii. 28). The solemn forebodings of the crisis which is close at hand, a crisis which will test all that is real and lasting in the faith of 'the Hebrews,' lead on to the practical and more personal exhortations of the closing chapter. The shaking of earth and heaven will reveal more clearly the present and unchanging kingdom of Christ. For Christians have not merely embraced a new belief or a new religion, they have entered upon a new condition. They have received the kingdom foretold in prophecy, unending, and established by God Himself (Dan. ii. 44): in which the life of the community as well as the individual is transformed, delivered from the tyranny of time and circumstance, lifted into the eternal world. Life has a new master, new laws, and new consolations. Yet, so far from involving the disregard of this world and its works and duties, the kingdom of God gives them a higher sanction and claim. God is to be served by making use of this present life to

the utmost, because it is no longer this life, but the life of heaven and eternity lived on earth.

This new life is, first of all, a 'kingdom.' Its aim is directed towards a personal Sovereign, with whom every individual has present and living relations. All have access to Him, all may share His human sympathy, all receive His largess of mercy and grace.

This truth, as it has been already pointed out, is one of the dominant and most characteristic features of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The sovereignty and priesthood of the ascended Christ are paramount facts. Him the Christian is bidden to 'consider' (iii. 1, xii. 3); to 'draw near unto' (iv. 16); to 'wait for' (ix. 28); to 'look unto' (xii. 2); to 'go forth unto'—'bearing His reproach' (xiii. 13). This personal devotion to the living Christ has taken the place alike of a shuddering obedience to a law written on tables of stone, of national hopes and ambitions, or of the aim at worldly wealth and prosperity. Whatever place these things may have in the new life of the kingdom, it is a subordinate one; Christ is to be obeyed, followed, loved, first and last.

In this concluding study of the Epistle, our aim will be to consider some of the characteristic features of this present kingdom of Christ, as they are scattered about in various hortatory portions of the Epistle, or drawn together in the simple and epigrammatic sentences of the epilogue.

Now certainly one of the most startling of these features—startling because it is one which the easy modern conception of 'our common Christianity' is tacitly tending to ignore—is this: Human life, lived in

the kingdom of Christ, has gained a new *seriousness*. It involves issues so much greater than man in his natural state can conceive. Everything in it is so much more important than at first sight appears, for the shadow of eternity rests upon it. Its constant atmosphere is one of 'reverence and awe.' If the Christian is no longer confronted with the terrors of Sinai, its 'cloud and majesty and awe,' he is encircled by eternal verities, the 'powers of the age to come.' He must remember that the primal lesson of the older revelation, so far from being abolished, has now gained for him its true significance. '*Our* God' (the God of the Christian) 'is a consuming fire' (xii. 29). In proportion to the brightness of Christian hopes and present gifts grows the darkness of possible failure and final loss. The Christian Faith and allegiance cannot be taken up and discarded at the light whim of the moment, as if they were mere matters of opinion. To fall away from the Faith, to disobey wilfully the law of Christ, is to take one's part in the greatest crime of the world's history; it is to 'crucify the Son of God afresh' (vi. 6); 'to tread underfoot' the Son of God (x. 29). Nature herself bears her stern witness against the apostate. The ground which yields no return to the gifts of God and the labours of man is 'rejected and nigh unto a curse, whose end is to be burned' (vi. 7, 8). Next to the warnings which fall from the lips of Christ Himself in the Gospels, there is no passage in the New Testament which with such impressive and awful reserve suggests the future fate of 'the lost' as x. 26–31. And what is said of Esau (xii. 16, 17), while it does

not apparently deny the possibility of repentance to those who desire it (see R.V.),[1] does certainly imply that a blessing once deliberately rejected can never be fully regained, even though sought 'diligently with tears.'

A life which involves such alternatives must certainly be a life of *detachment.* It has gained a new view of the proportionate value of things. Suffering has ceased to be the impracticable evil which it appears to us by nature (xii. 3–13). Separation even from the natural joys of society, or the approval of one's neighbours and countrymen, may be the truest patriotism. We may have to go 'without the camp,' to be excommunicate and outcast with Jesus, for our 'abiding city' is not here.

And yet it is equally clear, on the other hand, that the new life is represented as one of *joy*, of glad progress, and self-realisation. 'Boldness,' 'consolation,' 'glorying,' 'hope,' 'diligence,' are familiar words in the Epistle. There is a 'race' to be run (xii. 1), peace and holiness to be 'followed after' (*ib.* 14). This life of onward movement, effort, and suffering, is sustained by inward happiness, the joy of gratitude, the vision of Christ, the sense of the strong protection of Him Who said, 'I will in nowise fail thee, neither will I in anywise forsake thee' (xiii. 5). As a plain matter of history, this spirit of quiet cheerfulness and inward joy was one of the

[1] Apparently it was not repentance, but the 'blessing' which Esau sought in vain. 'No place of repentance' seems to mean no opportunity of altering his decision about his birthright. Once sold it could never be regained.

most remarkable gifts of Christianity to the world. It is a marked feature in all that we know of early Christian life and suffering. It stands out in contrast with both the wild efforts at pleasure, and the deep melancholy which characterised pagan society, and—must it not be added?—much of the society also of our own day. The often-quoted words of the *Shepherd* of Hermas (second century A.D.) illustrate the prevailing Christian ideal: 'Therefore clothe thyself in cheerfulness, which hath favour with God always, and is acceptable to Him, and rejoice in it. For the cheerful man worketh good and thinketh good, and despiseth sadness, but the sad man is always committing sin.' Faber has expressed the same truth in his profound and beautiful verses, 'The Old Labourer':

> He seemed a mere growth of earth;
> Yet even he had mirth,
> As the great angels have, untold and hidden.
> Always his downcast eye
> Was laughing silently,
> As if he found some jubilee in thinking;
> For his one thought was God,
> In that one thought he abode,
> For ever in that thought more deeply sinking.

But life lived in the kingdom of Christ is not mere individualism. We are not to think of the subjects of this kingdom as so many units attached by separate lines of spiritual connection with the Head. This kingdom is in its earthly aspect an organised society, with a common life, lived under due subordination to appointed rulers. The prominence given to them 'that have the rule over you,'

in chapter xiii., is very remarkable. They are mentioned three times : first, in xiii. 7 allusion is made to those who have already passed away, and whose examples of faith, especially as seen in the 'issue,' *i.e.* the end, or consummation of their lives, are to be imitated. Again, in xiii. 17 the actual living officials are mentioned, and in such terms that there is no doubt that they are spiritual rulers, 'they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account.' In xiii. 24 the writer sends greeting to them, distinguishing them from the general body, 'all the saints.' These rulers are undoubtedly the 'elders' or presbyters of the Church. They are alluded to in the Acts as forming a body of Church officials under their head, or, as we should call him, their bishop, St. James (Acts xv., xxi. 18). And it is evident that in organising the infant Churches, the appointment of such elders by the laying-on of hands, with prayer, by the Apostles or their representatives was regarded as an essential (Acts xiv. 23; Titus i. 5).

Without going into any controversy as to the early ministry of the Church, it is clear that the Christian ministry did exist among 'the Hebrews,' that its responsibility was to God Himself, and that, therefore, its appointment was from God. To these rulers the Hebrews are bidden to yield obedience and submission (xiii. 17). This simple exhortation reveals again a very different ideal of the Christian life from that which is current in our own day. Christians are to live under discipline. Disobedience to spiritual rulers involves a solemn retribution at the hands of God.

It is possible to fill in the picture to some extent

from other parts of the New Testament. The minister of the church was not merely the mouthpiece of congregational worship, nor the preacher of Christian truth; he was the shepherd, responsible for the welfare of the sheep (*cf.* 1 Pet. v. 1–4). Sin persisted in, whether the offence was moral or doctrinal, involved the authoritative separation of the offender from the communion of the Church. And this excommunication was a 'delivering over to Satan,' it was a banishment to the old world of darkness and alienation from God (*cf.* 1 Cor. v. 5, 11; 1 Tim. i. 20). And while much of the practical application of the Gospel was left to the individual conscience (*cf.* Rom. xiv.), rules, even of ecclesiastical discipline, once laid down, had an authority which was recognised as being the voice of the Holy Ghost Himself (*cf.* Acts xv. 28; 1 Cor. vii., xi.).

But the most pervading feature of the social life of Christ's kingdom is *charity*. Christian 'love of the brethren,' for which almost a new word appears in the Greek of the New Testament,[1] was truly a new thing in the world. The community of goods with which the Church began (Acts ii., iv.) continued in spirit, though the literal practice of it was soon found inadvisable. To do good and to communicate,' *i.e.* to share your goods with the needy, 'forget not' (xiii. 16). This charity was not confined to the limits of the Christian brotherhood. It was extended to strangers (*ib.* 2). Nay, it had a place in its heart for all the sorrows of the world (*ib.* 3). 'As being yourselves also in the body'—the

[1] φιλαδελφία.

words are significant. Our common humanity was never realised until the Church taught it as a deduction from the fact of the Incarnation. Not only are all men one in the Church, but Jesus Christ has gathered together in Himself human nature as a whole, and no human claim, nor need, nor sorrow is alien from Christian sympathy.

The ancient ties of nature have also gained a new solemnity. Marriage is to be 'had in honour among all' (*ib.* 4), for the Incarnation has raised it to a higher dignity, and attached a deeper condemnation to any infringement of its bond.

'Be ye free from the love of money' (*ib.* 5). Though Christians are not bound to a life of poverty, yet a life whose leading principle is the acquisition of wealth is absolutely contrary to Christian love and to Christian faith in the unseen.

The allusions to worship in xiii. 10 and 15 have been already noted.[1] In the Eucharist, and the continual and ordered thanksgivings of the Church, the exile will find consolation for his exclusion from this world's festivals.

The great benediction of xiii. 20, 21 suggestively traces Christian progress and happiness to the work of 'the God of peace,' and to that new power which the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus has brought into human life. The final word is 'Grace be with you all,' as if in this beautiful word all else were comprehended; 'grace' which implies not only supernatural power, but the charm of personal love, the love which gives freely, not as reward, but for love's sake; 'grace'

[1] See above, pp. 75–6, 106.

which, perhaps more than any other word, is associated with the bounty, the sympathy, the attractiveness of the Lord Jesus Himself.

If the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews opens out many truths of the faith which are ignored or largely misunderstood at the present day, we have much also to learn from it as to the practical realisation of the faith. For we are so easily contented in religion, we have so few ideals, and so many conventional hypocrisies. Civilisation, tinged with Christian ideas and phraseology, is, after all, as far removed from the apostolic ideal of Church life as the singing of sentimental hymns or the critical inattention to a weekly sermon is from the ideal of worship.

The social ideal of Christianity is not, indeed, one in which ranks or property have ceased to exist, for Christianity is truly human. Nor is it one in which there is no one content to perform the humblest services; but it certainly ought to mean the absolute supremacy of the law of Christ in all the relationships of life—*e.g.* those of employer and employed—as insistent in its claims on the latter as on the former. 'Eye-service' and bad work are as far removed from 'love of the brethren' as 'sweating' and swindling and moneyed selfishness. What an unlimited field of progress in its truest sense is opened by the substitution of the ideal of charity for that of self-interest! Once let it be again realised that the Church of Christ is a society called out of the world, owing its allegiance to another Master, measuring truth and worth by unworldly standards, aiming at a

life of thankfulness, intercession, sympathy, how different would be our attitude towards the heathen, the poor, the degraded!

Two injunctions which stand at the head of chapter xiii. seem peculiarly to rebuke modern English life—the teaching as to the sacredness of marriage and the inconsistency of covetousness. It is hardly too much to say that our present law of divorce in England is anti-Christian, and every acquiescence in it on the part of the baptized a treason to Christ. And the hypocrisy which allows the possession of money to override every other consideration, while it raises the cry of 'idolatry,' or 'sacerdotalism,' or 'superstition,' at every attempt to emphasise the supernatural character of the Church and her ordinances, is unsurpassed in the history of man's self-deceivings.

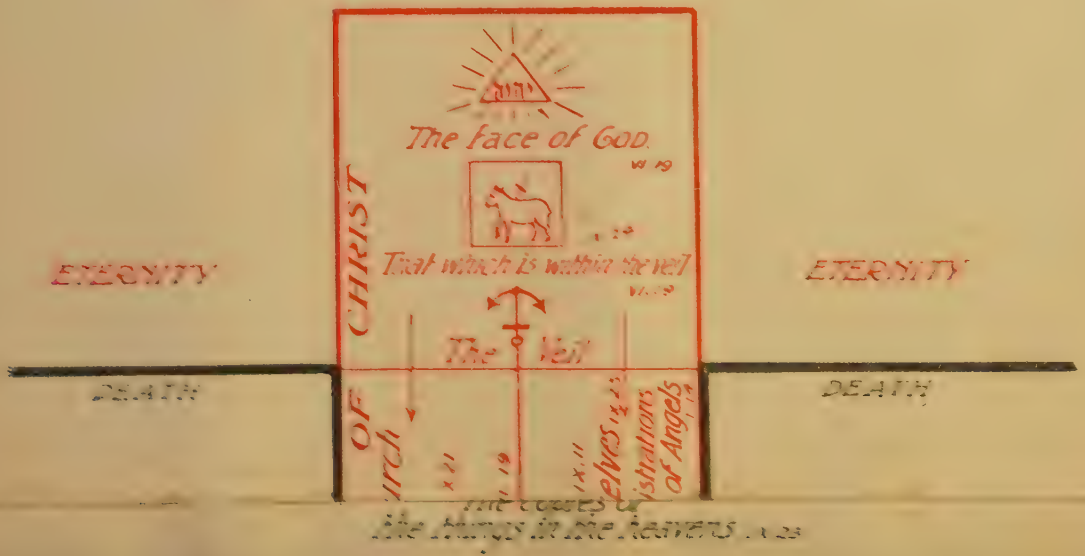
We have called the Epistle to the Hebrews 'the Epistle of Consolations' from the word which sums it up in the writer's farewell (xiii. 22)—a word which conveys the double meaning of exhortation and encouragement. If the teaching of the Epistle concerning the Person and Office of Christ seems peculiarly to fit in with the Church's present need, the need of sympathy in isolation, of incentives to progress and hope in a time when so much is being 'shaken,' may we not say also that its teaching with regard to the Christian life has a special value in the same direction? For the Christian life is in itself a 'consolation.' Intercession, sympathy, charity, purity, react on the doers. The effort after them for Christ's sake is a strong witness in itself to the truth of the faith

on which they rest. 'We know,' says St. John, 'that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren' (1 John iii. 14).

Some of the problems of our present incomplete condition may seem insoluble, yet love is the key which unlocks all mysteries. The love of God is the harmony of the apparent contradictions of revelation; His love will ultimately solve even such a residual problem as the existence of evil, while our love of Him enables us to wait for the fuller light. Love of man for Christ's sake is leading us even now in hidden ways to the end of such puzzles as the divisions of God's Church and the persistence of heathendom. 'For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face.'

The Greater & more perfect Tabernacle

Heb. IX. 11



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Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd., Printers, New-street Square, London